

SERMONS

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS,

VIZ.

The character and blessedness of the merciful.	The diversity of conditions among mankind, the appointment of Providence.
The blessedness of seeing God in this life, and also in heaven.	The excellence of Charity.
The character of the pure in heart.	Men naturally capable of knowing and doing well.
The necessity of being pure in heart.	The certainty of being accepted of God in well-doing.
The character and blessedness of the peacemakers.	The advantage of a religious life in point of certainty, beauty, worth, and pleasantness.
The character and blessedness of those that are persecuted for righteousness sake.	No. Faith saving but that which works by Love.

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of TAUNTON.

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S E R M O N



S E R M O N I.

The character and blessedness of the merciful represented.

MATTH. V. 7.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.



EACH of these Beatitudes carries in it a command, enjoining that virtue, to which the Beatitude belongs; so that when our Saviour saith, *Blessed are the merciful*, it is the same; as if in more words he had said to his hearers, “ whosoever would be a disciple of mine must be merciful; I require it of him, and upon no other condition will I own him to be one of my followers.”

"lowers." And Christ is not so hard a master, as to command and expect things impossible; he *knows what is in man*, the little strength we have of our own, and all those assistances we farther need; and being most *merciful* himself, he will give us *grace* proportioned to those heights of spiritual perfection to which he calls us. Let no man, therefore, plead, "I cannot help my natural temper; if I am not among those whom Christ pronounces *blessed*, it is no fault of mine:" on the contrary, give me leave to say, it is doing great injustice to the Saviour of mankind, and not only grossly but wilfully misrepresenting the meaning of his words, to talk after this manner. He plainly tells us, that we must be so and so qualified, in order to partake of the rewards of the gospel; not that we can immediately work these qualifications in ourselves, or even attain to them without the succours of divine *grace*; nor is any such thing demanded; but this he demands, and very justly, that we should unfeignedly endeavour after every good disposition, that we should use all the means appointed to this end, and practise the external duty; and whoever keeps on in this course, he is sure, in the end, not to want any one holy disposition of mind, or degree of such disposition necessary to entitle him to the christian

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christian *blessedness*. And, therefore, instead of making excuses, which will never be admitted by our Judge, for our not being such persons as the gospel requires, let us in earnest set ourselves to know and do the will of God, that we may be *blessed in the deed*; as we certainly shall, if we are no more wanting to the *grace* of God, than that *grace* is wanting to us.

IN treating of this excellent temper of *mercy*, I shall,

I. EXPLAIN the character of the *merciful*: and,

II. REPRESENT their *blessedness*.

I. I SHALL begin with explaining the character of the *merciful*. For this purpose, it may be of some use to observe, that *mercy* is something beyond strict *justice*; they are therefore, in scripture, not only mentioned distinctly, but placed in their natural order, first *justice*, and then *mercy*, as a higher degree of perfection. ^a *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy?* ^b *You have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy.* *Justice* there must be where there is *mercy*, it being impossible

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that

^a Micah. vi. 8.

^b Matt. xxiii. 23.

that he, whose character it is to be *merciful* to all, should be knowingly *unjust* to any; that he who takes a pleasure in delivering others from the evils they suffer, should, himself, willingly bring evils upon them which they have not deserved. In vain, therefore, does any pretend to the greater virtue, who has not the less; nor will it suffice, that a person perform the lesser duty, when the greater is in his power. We must not only be *just*, but *merciful*. To *do justly*, is only paying a debt, for which the Creditor owes us no thanks; to love and practise *mercy*, is doing something by which we oblige another to thankfulness, not being under the *same* obligation to *mercy* that we are to *justice*. Take notice I only say the *same*; for obliged we are to be *merciful* as well as to be *just*; but then this obligation does not arise, as that of being *just* does, from another man's having a claim to all that I render him as properly his own, but from other considerations. 'Tis true, in one sense, *mercy* itself is but strict *justice*; that is, *mercy* to men is no more than *justice* to God. But, as we are here speaking of *justice*, as it regards our fellow-creatures, it is certain, that, in this respect, the ideas of *justice* and *mercy* are very distinct, and that *mercy* bespeaks something nobler than simple *justice*. — I would further remark, that

SER. I. *merciful represented.*

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that as *mercy* differs from strict *justice*, so it is not of the same extent with *goodness*. Indeed, all *mercy*, implies *goodness*, or kind affection towards others; but, on the other hand, all *goodness* is not *mercy*: we do not call the *goodness* of God to angels, or to men in a state of innocence, by the name of *mercy*; nor is it proper to say, that we show *mercy* to another as often as we give him a proof of our good will. *Mercy* is *goodness* or *benevolence*, at it respects the unhappy; that is, those, who upon one account or other, are objects of our compassion.

THE *merciful* man may be thus defined:—He is one who, by the goodness of the christian temper, is constantly disposed to show *mercy* where it is proper, and he is in a capacity of doing it. — By the goodness of the christian temper, I mean such a benevolence or good-will towards our fellow-creatures, as flows from the principles of religion and virtue. The *merciful* man, in the judgment of God, is *merciful* out of choice, and as the effect of the right use of his reason; he has a sense of duty deeply impress'd upon his mind, and an habitual inclination of heart correspondent to it: as the command of God obliges him to be *merciful*, so love and gratitude to God prompt him; and the consideration of the real excellence and amiableness of the

thing, and its being an imitation of the divine nature, and the like, powerfully incline him to it. Such is that goodness from which the kindness and beneficence of the *merciful* man proceeds. It is never found alone, but in company with all the other virtues of the christian life, and attended with the practice of every duty; so that, in the language of the gospel, no man is *merciful* towards his fellow-creatures, who is not likewise temperate in regard of himself, and devout, and obedient, and resigned towards God. Where the natural temper is compassionate and sympathising, this christian goodness, instead of extinguishing *nature*, which was what the *Stoicks* proposed, will build upon it, and improve and refine it into a grace. Religion never opposes *nature* when it leans the right way; but, on the contrary, encourages every such disposition as tends to the happiness of the individual, or the benefit of society; and which may, therefore, be esteemed truly natural. Do we not read in ^c scripture of the *tender mercies of God*, the *sounding of his bowels*, his being *full of compassion*, and his *heart's being turned within him*, and the like? Now, though these expressions are plainly used, in condescension to human weak-

^c Psal. cxlv. 9. Is. lxiii. 15. Psal. lxxxvi. 15.
Hos. xi. 8.

weakness, signifying no more than that the *mercy* of God operates as effectually, as if it sprung immediately from natural affections, by which he was actuated; yet, from hence we may argue, that such natural affections, how incompatible soever with the perfection and blessedness of the divine nature, are no disgrace to the nature of man in the present state, to the necessities of which they are very well suited. Surely, St. Paul would never have told the *Philippians*, that *he longed after them in the bowels of Christ*; or have exhorted the *Colossians* *to put on bowels of mercy*; if wisdom obliged us to stifle in ourselves, as much as possible, all the emotions and sentiments of *mercy* as a natural passion, and to follow our duty, purely upon the motives of reason and religion, without deriving any succour from natural inclination. Were it possible to do this, which it is not, yet we should not endeavour it; but rather acknowledge the goodness of God, in this alliance between inclination and duty, and labour to strengthen it, by diligently cultivating every useful principle, whether natural or supernatural. What we are to remember is, that a natural *mercifulness* of temper by itself will not do; neither producing such a constant series of *merciful* and *kind* actions against all temptations to

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the

‡ Phil. i. 8.

‡ Colos. iii. 12.

the contrary, as when it is improved by the clear light of the understanding, the convictions of conscience, and the influences of *divine grace*; nor, when purely *natural*, be intitled to any reward; but when that *mercifulness* which is inspired by the principles of the gospel, is added to that which springs from nature, what was only an amiable instinct, becomes an excellent virtue, acceptable to God, and sure to be rewarded by him: or, if it should so happen, that a man's natural temper is not the best in this respect, rather inclining to *severity* than *mercy*; yet, where the gospel exerts its mighty influence, so as to create the soul anew, and dispose it to all the exercises of christian compassion, this evangelical goodness will supply the defects of nature, and becoming, by custom, a second nature, will give a person great satisfaction in doing acts of *mercy*, which before afforded him little or none. And there is one thing to be said even for this natural *severity* of temper, that such persons are better disposed to maintain the rights of *justice* in the world; and, in this view, the wisdom of God appears, as to the diversity of tempers so remarkable among mankind, that the Author of nature designed it for the good of societies, to which it is manifestly subservient; since, if all men were *pitiful* and *compassionate* in the

the degree that some are so, the instances of a righteous and necessary *severity*, would be so few, as not sufficiently to awe those who are inclined to invade the rights of others. Let those of opposite tempers, only take care, on the one hand, that their *compassion* does not betray them into an undistinguishing gentleness, prejudicial to the necessary execution of *justice*; and, on the other, that their *severity* does not degenerate into savageness and inhumanity, which will render them deaf to the calls of *mercy*; and let these latter only follow the genius of the gospel, and it will soon bring them to a temper suited to this mixed, imperfect state of things, in which there is need of *mercy*, as well as of *justice*. And, it may be truly said, in honour to that wise and gracious Being who has framed our nature, that there is some disposition to the exercise of *mercy* in every one's constitution, that there are some seeds of a *merciful* temper in all, though not so visible in some natures: and where the gospel comes in its power, even these persons will, as *the elect of God*, put on bowels of *mercy*; the latent seeds of benevolence and goodness, will spring up, gain strength continually, and bring forth fruit to perfection.

HAVING given you this general account of the virtue of *mercifulness*, it may be
pro-

proper to consider some particular instances in which this christian temper displays itself; but before I do this, I would briefly premise *two* things;—That *mercifulness*, like many other virtues, is, in its exercise, governed by *prudence*;—And that it is limited by *justice*. I hinted this just now, but think it needful to take more express notice of it.

I. THE exercises of a *merciful* temper, are to be governed by *prudence*. A man may be indiscretely *merciful*, not chusing a proper object, or a less proper one; or mistaking in the *degree* or *manner* of shewing *mercy*. *Prudence* is necessary to direct us in all these, that following the dictates of a generous heart, but not using so much discretion as we should, we may not suffer ourselves to be deceived with the first appearance of things, which are not always the truest; and when we think we are doing an act of *mercy*, encourage sloth, and wickedness, and hypocrisy. And then, as to the *degree*; that person who is a worthy object of *mercy* in one *degree*, may not be so in another; or rather, what is *mercy* in a lower *degree*, may cease to be *mercy* when carried further, not being needed. And, as to the *manner* in which we exercise *mercy*, we are to consider in what way it will most effectually

effectually answer its end, and not what they who are the objects of it would chuse; or what will only satisfy a present occasion, but not be so beneficial at long run. I must put in one caveat here, *viz.* that, under pretence of using *prudence* in our *mercy*, we must not distinguish away our obligations to this virtue, and either wholly neglect, or unseasonably delay an act of *mercy*, when a fit opportunity offers: better be guilty of an error on the other hand, by being *merciful* in the wrong place, than not to be so when it is necessary.

2. As *mercy* must, in many instances, be governed by *prudence*, so it is sometimes limited by *justice*. Circumstances may be such, that *mercy* to one man, would be *injustice* to another, perhaps to a great number. Now, in this sense, *justice* must always take place of *charity*. The obligations of *justice*, are first to be considered and discharged; and then, if after these are secured, we can indulge to a *merciful* temper, we should not, willingly, baulk any inviting occasion of doing it. The usefulness of these *two* observations will be best judged of, when we are considering some of the particular instances in which a *merciful* temper discovers itself.

1. THE first instance I shall name, is mercy to the poor. There is no age in which that observation of our Saviour is not verified, *the poor you have always with you.* Some there will be who are unavoidably such, though more whose poverty is their fault; and what our duty is towards such persons, no one can be ignorant, who reads the scriptures. *He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that has mercy on the poor happy is he.* And so again, *he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker; but he that honoureth him bath mercy on the poor.* *The righteous considereth the cause of the poor; but the wicked regardeth not to know it.* Here the Law and the Prophets speak the same language. *The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land.* *Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring thy poor who are cast out to thine house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities*

¹ Mat. xxvi. 11. ² Prov. xiv. 21—31 ³ Prov. xxix. 7. ⁴ Deut. xv. 11. ⁵ Isa. lviii. 7. ⁶ Dan. iv. 27.

ties by shewing mercy to the poor. ¹ If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, the merciful man does never content himself to say, depart in peace, be you warmed, be you filled; for, as the Apostle James takes notice, if, notwithstanding, such good words, we give them not those things which are needful for the body, what does it profit either them or us? But then to know in what manner and degree we are to shew mercy to such persons, prudence must be consulted. Some, as I observed just now, are poor through their own fault; now, supposing this, yet, if in the condition in which they at present are, they cannot help themselves, we ought to pity and succour them, notwithstanding their having brought themselves into it; and if to our alms we add our endeavours to convince them of their sin, that they may truly repent of it, and amend their doings, so much the better. If they are under no wants but what they could very well supply themselves, would they but take the pains to do it, then the best way of shewing mercy to such, is to oblige them to work, it not being a real kindness to any one, to encourage him in a life of idleness. This is agreeable to the direction of the Apostle; ² If any man will not work, neither let him eat. As for the virtuous

¹ James ii. 15, 16. ² 2 Thess. iii. 10.

virtuous poor, they have a double title to our relief, as poor, and as virtuous; and it looks as if that man had but little religion and goodness himself, who can, knowingly, suffer any who fear God, to want food convenient, when it is in the power of his hands to give it to them. What *mercy* challenges is, that *° we deliver the poor when they cry.* The *manner* of doing it, whether by finding them employment, by occasional charities, or stated provisions, must be left to every one's discretion; so the thing be really and effectually done, in whatever way it be, the demands of *mercy* are satisfied.

2. THOSE who are brought into circumstances of distress by calamitous accidents, may reasonably expect that *mercy* should be shown them which they want. Perhaps they are at a distance from their home, and have not where-withal to support themselves by the way without begging, being, some how or other, reduced to great streights. Perhaps they have had losses by fire, or have suffered shipwreck, or been ruined by the knavery of other men. 'Tis true, many who apply for charity under such pretences as these, are no better than cheats, who delight to ramble from place to place, and, by such acts as these, to get money from those

those who are inclined to commiserate persons in distress; and, therefore, we cannot be blamed, if, according to the direction before given, we are upon our guard, and prudently make what inquiry we can into the truth of the case; but then, if upon inquiry, we find no just ground for suspicion of any fraud, or the case, at worst, be only doubtful, we oughtnot to withhold our hand from doing good, least, instead of acting the part of the *merciful* man, we be like *Nabal*^p, who, to cover his own covetous and churlish temper (when *David*'s young men apply'd to him to give them whatever came to his hand) made use of this plea; *Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants, now-a-days, that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give 'it unto men whom I know not from whence they be?* Life is full of casualties and changes, some of them very distressful, for which, as every *wise* man will endeavour to be prepared, with respect to himself, so every *merciful* man, with regard to others. Our Saviour's parable of the *good Samaritan*, is very instructive. The *Priest* and the *Levite*, though of the same nation and religion with the unfortunate

^p 1 Sam. xxv. 10, &c. ¹ Luke x. 30—

nate person who had fallen among thieves, who stript him of his raiment, and wounded him, leaving him half dead; and though, by their profession, more peculiarly obliged to be examples of every kind of virtue, yet did no more than just look upon him, and then passed by on the other side; but this honest man, whose heart was as much better, as his religion was worse than theirs, though there were no dealings between the Samaritans and the Jews, no sooner saw him, than he had compassion on him, bound up his wounds, pouring in oyl and wine, and having brought him to the next inn upon his own beast, leaves what money he had to spare with the host, telling him, that whatever farther expence he should be at upon the poor man, he would be answerable for it. What may not be hoped for from the true religion, where it is profess'd in sincerity, if such instances as these may be supposed to occur under a false one, or where the true has been extremely corrupted, which was the case of the Samaritans?

3. To those who labour under great bodily infirmities, imperfections, sicknesses, or pains, pity should be shown. 'Tis barbarous to make the imperfections and blemishes of others, whether in the shape of their bodies or otherwise, the subject of mirth,

mirth; nothing can be more abhorrent from the temper of a *merciful* and *tender-hearted* man: such a one will be ready, as often as he is called to it, to visit the sick, and to pray for them, and by kind and christian discourse, or by any assistance he can give them, to render their condition less grievous and insupportable to them. The same he will do.

4. If they are in a state of trouble and affliction upon any other account. While he bears the case of the afflicted upon his heart before the throne of the heavenly mercy, making intercession with God on their behalf, that he would comfort them who are cast down; he will not be backward to do all he can to administer consolation to them; he will think how he may make their burthen lighter, *comfort the feeble-minded*, and let in light and joy upon the soul that walketh in darknes: in a word, *he will remember them who are in adversity, as being himself likewise in the body*; especially, such as suffer for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, because they dare not profess what they do not believe, nor practise any thing which they apprehend their religion condemns. When persons of this character are imprison'd or banish'd from their homes, or despoiled

: 1 Theff. v. 14

: Heb. xiii. 3.

of their goods, or feel the rage of the persecutor in any other instances, the rage and malice of their enemies serves but the more to excite his *mercy* and compassion.

5. He can *'have compassion on the ignorant and those who are out of the way*, whether their error be in point of doctrine or practice. Does another ignorantly oppose any truth, or espouse any false opinion; do what he ought not, or omit to do what he ought; or scruple things of an indifferent nature? He is not a friend to rough and hasty methods, values no victory but what is obtained by argument, and instruction, and other fair means, makes allowances for the different capacities and opportunities of men, and even for their prejudices and passions, and patiently waits for the conviction and return of those who are unknowingly gone astray: nay, *"if a person be overtaken in a fault which will not admit of the plea of ignorance, he follows the advice of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering himself least he also be tempted."* Put the case yet farther, that a man is not barely chargeable with a single fault committed under great temptations, but is engaged in a course of vice; the *merciful* man does not think, that even such a one
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† Heb. v. 2.

‡ Gal. vi. 1.

has forfeited all title to compassion; or how little soever it may be deserved on the one hand, that it is not due on the other: he considers the condition of persons blinded, infeeble, and enslav'd by sin, as the most deplorable in the whole world, and therefore, in *mercy* to them, will gladly be subservient to the *grace* of God, in convincing and reclaiming them; and, much more, will be careful not to make them more hardned and desperate by any want of *mercy* on his part; he will be contriving one way after another to win upon them, and manage his reproofs so, that they may appear to proceed from kindness, and by that means enter into them, and bring them *into captivity to the obedience of Christ*.

6. CAN he punish an offender at his discretion? the *merciful* man rather chuses to forgive and pass by the offence; this is what he chuses, tho', contrary to his inclinations, he is sometimes obliged to punish. This is often the case as to parents, masters of families, and magistrates; the fault is such that they cannot suffer it to go wholly unpunished without being wanting to themselves, to others, and even to the guilty persons; but then if they are among the *merciful*, who do not willingly correct, the punishments they inflict are no greater than are absolutely necessary, and are always temper'd

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with *mercy*. When they can safely do it, and there is a prospect of a happy effect from gentler means, they are better pleas'd to overlook an offence, and if they err, 'tis always on the *merciful* side; and the success of such kind and gentle methods generally, if not always, justifies their choice of them, so as in point of prudence, as well as in other respects, to prove them the best and most eligible.—This may be sufficient for the *character* of the *merciful*.

II. THEIR *blessedness* comes next to be considered. *Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.*

I. THEY are most likely to find it from men, if they happen to need it; as, considering the changeableness of all human things, 'tis very possible they may. Where is the man who is exempted from the common infelicities of life, or the weaknesses and errors incident to human nature? And 'tis seldom but mankind are so just as to make a distinction between those, who in the time of their ease and prosperity were inclined to do good, and to communicate, and to be gentle and favourable; and others, whom the miseries of their neighbour did not at all move to compassion, who perhaps were rather *cruel* than *merciful*. Do these two sorts of men fall
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into a condition which is the reverse of what they once lived in? The different treatment they meet with from the world will be answerable to their different character and conduct before; in so much that almost all will be ready to pity and help the former, few or none the latter. They *forgave* and shall be *forgiven*; ^w *they gave*, and it shall be given again; good measure, pressed down and shaken together, shall men give into their bosom; for with the same measure men mete withal, it shall be measur'd to them again, even by their fellow men, who are seldom so bad as intirely to disregard this part of distributive justice. The fate of the *unmerciful* man is often agreeable to those words of the *Psalmist*, ^x *let there be none to extend mercy to him, because he remembred not to show mercy; but persecuted the poor and needy, that he might even slay the broken in heart.* And however this be, yet,

2. THEY are sure to find *mercy* with God, who are *merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful.* Both our natural notions of God, and the revelation he hath made of his will to mankind, assure us of this; ^y *with the merciful he will shew himself merciful.* The reason is, that he cannot but delight in those who are like himself;

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^u Luke. vi. 38, ^z Psal. cix. 12. ^y Psal. xviii. 25,

self; and the more like him they are, the more he will delight in them, and consequently delight more to show favour to them. Hardly any man can be so ignorant of himself and of his condition as to think, he does not stand in any need of the mercy of God. Alas, what could the best and happiest of men do without that mercy? ** 'Tis of his mercy that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* Should he proceed with us according to the rigour of justice, who of us could stand in his sight? In this case the expediency and wisdom of following our Saviour's advice is manifest; ** when ye stand praying, forgive if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.* To which he adds, *but if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.* And accordingly, in the ^b parable of the king who took account of his servants, when there was brought unto him one who ow'd him ten thousand talents, upon his falling down to him, and intreating him to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the whole debt: but when this same servant, instead of imitating his Lord, proceeded to the utmost severity with

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* Lam. iii. 22. * Mark xi. 25. ^b Matt. xviii. 23.—

a fellow servant who ow'd him, in comparison, an inconsiderable sum; his Lord was so exceedingly displeas'd with him for a conduct, alike ungrateful to him, and unmerciful to his fellow servant, as to recall his former grant, and to deliver him to the officer of justice, *till he should pay all that was due unto him.* So likewise, saith Christ, *shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* And is not this a consideration fitted to work upon men of all tempers? Is not our condition happy or miserable according as our sins are forgiven or not? Now the *mercy* we shew to men, being of the right kind, gives us a title to the pardoning *mercy* of God; that expression of *Solomon* being true in this sense, if it was not the sense intended, *by mercy and truth iniquity is purged.* Not that there is any thing of proper atonement or merit in *mercy*, or as if the *merciful* man were safe in a course of unrepented sin; no, it only signifies the great acceptableness of a *merciful* temper to the God of *mercy*, when it proceeds from right principles; and that *mercy* is one very good sign, among others, of our being the children of God, and in a state of favour with him. The day of final retribution is a time

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when we shall all be obliged to cast ourselves upon the *mercy* of our Judge; and how shall we find *mercy* in that day? not, surely, by denying to our fellow creatures that *mercy* and *kindness* which we hope for from God; the Apostle^d *James* having told us, that *he shall have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy*; while, in respect of the *merciful* man, *mercy rejoiceth against judgment*. The representation our Saviour gives of the transactions of that awful day, in the 25th chap. of St. *Matthw's* Gospel, is well known; and the sentence is made to turn upon the exercise or neglect of acts of *mercy*, which acts of *mercy* he farther represents, as shown or denied to him; *in as much as ye have done or not done it to one of the least of these my brethren* (i. e. given meat to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, taken in the stranger, cloathed the naked, visited the sick and the imprisoned) *ye have done or not done it unto me*. When this is considered, who will not join his suffrage with our blessed Saviour when he saith, *Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy?*

LET us now very briefly *Apply* the whole in a use of Exhortation.—We have seen the *character* of the *merciful* man explained, and his *blessedness* shown; let us resolve to

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^d James. ii. 13.

go and do likewise; let this spirit run thro' all our actions, for it will give them a very great grace and beauty. *Mercy* adorns every condition, whether private or publick; no man loses any thing of his influence upon others, or the respect he has from them, by showing *mercy* upon every proper occasion; and when he doth show *mercy*, doing it with chearfulness, as a thing his very heart is set upon. The obedience and service which are paid to a parent or master of this character are from the heart, and therefore more certain and constant; nor is the authority of the publick magistrate ever so well regarded, as when it sits easy upon the governed, and is attended with *mercy*. * *By mercy shall the throne be established*, saith the Prophet *Isaiab*. Among all the titles of a sovereign prince, that of *clemency* adds the greatest lustre to his crown, as it is the attribute which God himself most delights in. The christian institution is in a peculiar manner adapted to inspire sentiments of *mercy* and *compassion*, as there is no other which lays such a stress upon them: here we have the *mercy* of God unveiled and exhibited in the most surprizing displays of it; *pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin*, justifying the guilty, raising the miserable, supporting the weak,

weak, restoring the wandering and the fallen, endeavouring to soften the obdurate, waiting for the return of the delaying sinner, and filling the hungry soul with goodness. *Ye likewise know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that tho' he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, thro' his poverty, might be made rich: that he is a merciful as well as faithful high-priest; had pity on all the children of distress when he convers'd here upon earth, and does not forget the infirmities or sufferings of his members in his most exalted state. Now God forbid we should not follow such patterns! God forbid we should not practise a thing which will be so much our honour, and contribute so much to our happiness present and future! If any virtue is its own reward, tis a benevolence which knows how to adapt itself to the weaknesses and wants of all our fellow creatures. This world is the only place, and this life the only time, wherein there is any room for the exercise of mercy properly so called; in heaven tis all innocence, and content, and fulness of joy; the blessed love one another perfectly, but to be merciful they have no occasion to eternity; there they forever enjoy the effects of the divine mercy, and reap the fruits of their own, of which they sowed*

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.

‡ Heb. ii. 17.

SER. I. *merciful represented.* 27

sowed the seeds here upon earth. Wherefore, let us lay hold of the opportunity which this present life furnishes for the practice of every virtue, particularly of *faith*, and *hope*, and *patience*, and *mercy*, which can have no place in the world to come.



SER.



S E R M O N II.

The blessedness of seeing God in
this life.

MATTH. V. 8.

*Blessed are the pure in heart; for
they shall see God.*

BESIDES the excellency of our Saviour's sermon on the mount, as it contains a summary of christian *morals*, the *place*, the *preacher*, the *manner*, the *introduction*, are all of them very observable. The *place* chosen for this purpose was a *mountain*, wherein the publication of the *gospel* answered to the delivery of the *law*, which was likewise from a *mountain*; so far there was a conformity between them, but in little else; for, whereas, the ^a *law* was given by the disposition of angels, there-
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^a Acts vii. 53.

SER. II. *seeing God in this life.* 29

fore also called, ^b *the word spoken by angels,* (who probably were employed in forming the voices in the air, the thunders, and lightnings, and all the rest of that dreadful scene) the publisher here is the ^c *only begotten Son of God, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; being so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* For unto which of the angels said he at any time, *thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* This great and glorious person we should hear with reverent, modest, and obedient hearts; and the greater his dignity, the greater will our guilt be if we reject him. ^d *The queen of the south came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here.* ^e *Consider this ye despisers, and wonder, and perish. The Men of Nineveh shall rise up against you in judgment and condemn you; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.* ^f *He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who neglects so great salvation, and*
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^b Heb. ii. 2.

^d Matt. xii. 42.
28; xii. 25.

^c John iii. 16.

^e Acts xiii. 41.

Heb. i. 3.—

^f Heb. x.

refuseth him that speaketh from heaven?

The manner of teaching was familiar, with the allowance of the utmost freedom to all who would, to draw round him, as they did about their ordinary teachers; to signify the mild and gracious nature of the evangelical dispensation; no pomp, no awful ensigns of majesty, no marks of the divinity, unless what appeared in his countenance, and in his doctrine; but all is gentle and condescending. ² *We are not come to the mount which burned with fire, nor to blackness, and darkness, and tempest; and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they who heard intreated, that the word should not be spoken to them any more; for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart: But we are come to mount Zion. There the people were driven at a distance; here Christ being set, his disciples (not the twelve, or the seventy only, but the whole multitude of his disciples) came unto him; and how does he address them? not in thunders, as from mount Sinai; not in curses, as from mount Ebal, but with blessings. The sermon is introduced with a roll of Beatitudes; and this is the usual method in practical sciences, in which the end is first treated*

² Heb. xii. 18.—

treated of, to gain the greater regard to what is afterwards laid down. The end regulates the means, and therefore the *moral* Philosopher begins his discourses with an inquiry after *happiness*, knowing that the whole duty of man cannot be so well ascertained, till it is first agreed what constitutes his *happiness*. For a like reason, we may suppose, the book of *Psalms* is opened after this manner, ^b *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful: but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law does he meditate day and night.* All mankind, for these *six thousand years*, have been in search after happiness; in the general desire of which the *fall* made no alteration, though it might in the notion of it. In this the sons of men are commonly mistaken, seeking happiness where it is not to be found. We are better instructed by our divine *Master*, who corrects our false opinions, and directs us in the strait and certain, ⁱ though narrow way, that leadeth to life, felicity, and glory. 'Tis also worth our observation, how widely the judgment of Christ, concerning true *blessedness*, differs from that of the world. *Blessed*, in the account of the world, are the rich, the great, the prosperous, the powerful, they

^b Psal. i. 1, 2.ⁱ Matt. vii. 14.

they who live in pleasure, and have the means of gratifying their revenge, and every other inclination of their corrupt hearts; who are admired, and courted, and followed by all: on the other hand, *Blessed, saith our Saviour, are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace-makers, and the men who are persecuted for righteousness sake.* Of these the character and blessedness of the *pure in heart*, is what I would at present, recommend to your consideration and choice. *Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.*—In the words we have these two things observable.

I. A very great *privilege*, or *blessedness*, proposed by our Saviour to his followers.

II. THE *disposition*, or *qualification* required for the enjoyment of it. The former consists in *seeing God*, the latter in *purity of heart*.

I. HERE is a very great *privilege*, and *blessedness*, proposed by our Saviour to his followers, no less than the favour of *seeing God*. But are we not told, that *no man has seen God at any time*, that it is impossible to *see him and live*, that he is the king
invisible

invisible, that he is a *Spirit*, a pure incorporeal essence, to whom nothing that is material can be likened, considered as a *spiritual* Being, and much more considered as both *spiritual* and *infinite*? Reason, therefore, will tell us, that what is here promised, cannot be meant of *seeing God* with our bodily eyes, or immediately, and in himself, or by means of an image and representation of him. And we should be careful not to form any such gross conceptions of God as these, equally derogatory to his perfections, and tending to corrupt the devotion and worship which we pay to him. I shall, therefore, distinctly show you what is meant by *seeing God*, and then prove that it is a very great *blessedness*, even the greatest to which a reasonable creature can aspire, to *see and enjoy God*.

THERE is a *two-fold* vision of God, one less proper and less perfect, the other more so; one in this life, the other in the life to come; one the privilege of the believer, the other of the glorified saint.

THAT *vision* of God, which is less proper and attainable in the present life, seems to consist chiefly in these *three* things;—in the saving knowledge of God—in a comfortable sense of his presence—and a constant, joyous intercourse with him.

1. To *see God*, is to have a saving knowledge of him. Knowledge is no other than *mental vision*, 'tis seeing things with the eye of the mind. Now, as in all vision, besides the visive faculty, there must be light, and a proper position of the object, 'tis the same here. The understanding is the eye of the soul, by which it is capable of apprehending things of a spiritual kind, being assisted by a natural or supernatural light. We read of the ^k *το γνωσεν το θεον*, that which is knowable of God by the light of nature, shining in the creation, and discovering the glorious name of God written on his works; *because, that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.* But then, there is a great deal which cannot be known of God in this way, *which flesh and blood cannot reveal to us, which* ¹ *none but the only begotten Son can declare*; which guides men by a supernatural light, either external in his *Word*, or internal by his *Spirit*. Every one, acquainted with the gospel-revelation, whether converted or unconverted, may, in some sense, be said to be *taught of God*, and knows more of him than he could have done in the mere use and improvement of his natural faculties. He cannot doubt of the transcen-

* Rom. i. 19.

¹ John i. 18.

transcendent holiness of God, so illustriously seen in the sacrifice of Christ; nor of his *grace* and *good-will* to sinners, so wonderfully display'd in providing and accepting this sacrifice, and restoring them to the hope of eternal life through him. However, there is a knowledge yet more valuable than this, not so much in respect of the object, as the manner and the efficacy of it; and that is the knowledge which the *converted*, the *pure in heart*, have of God in Christ, ^m *whom to know, is life eternal*; whereas, carnal minds *know nothing as they ought to know*. The *pure in heart*, being freed from the power of corrupt prejudices, and irregular passions, and fixedly contemplating their heavenly Father, as revealed in the gospel, see him in a light which will not suffer them any longer to prefer lying vanities to their true felicity; no longer regard God, as an object of speculation only, but of love, desire, hope, fear, joy, trust, and adoration, and all in a supreme degree; they confide in him as their father, imitate him as their pattern, and seek his favour as their chief good. There is a transforming virtue accompanying evangelical truths, to minds rightly disposed, insomuch, as that ⁿ *while with open face they behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the*

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same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. This is a sort of knowledge which may be well described by *seeing God*; whereas, concerning the boasted knowledge of the greater part of professing christians, it may be truly said, that it is no knowledge, *in seeing they do not see*, they grope at noon-day, as in the thick darkness, and in them are fulfilled those words of our Saviour, which should make us tremble when we read them; ° *For judgment am I come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be blind.*

2. To *see God*, may signify the christians having a comfortable sense of his presence. Our eyes inform us of the presence of material objects, of whose existence we cannot doubt, when we see them to be near us; in like manner, *the pure in heart* has an inward sense, or consciousness, which assures him of the Being and presence of God, whom, therefore, he may, in some sense, be said *to see*, being satisfied of his presence from the proofs and effects of it, though not in the very same degree, and with the very same kind of certainty as we are of the reality of things attested by our bodily sight. I would not, willingly, give the least countenance to *Enthusiasm*, by encouraging men
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in the fond conceit or expectation of any such extraordinary communications with the Deity, as the *Prophets* and *Apostles*, with other *inspired* persons enjoyed : they had visions and revelations, not for themselves, but for the benefit of the church in all ages, which, for that very reason, are not now to be expected, since we are to be guided by the sacred *Scriptures*, which were formerly written by the *inspiration of God*, not by private fancies of our own, under pretence of their being the dictates or impulses of the *Spirit*. But, is there no keeping clear of *Enthusiasm*, without running into a contrary extreme ? Because, good men are not upon an equal foot with the *Prophets* and *Apostles*, must they, therefore, be reduced to a level with the rest of mankind, and have no privileges beyond the most vicious and wicked, in regard to the divine presence with them ? This is what I cannot suppose. No bounds can be set to an infinite essence, no place or limits, confine or exclude it. God is every where present, and every where active, so pervading all things as to *uphold them all by the word of his power*, supports and actuates both worlds of *spirits* and of *matter*, directing the motion of every atom and of every thought ; such is the *essential* presence of God, from which the several ranks of creatures derive their powers and operations.

ons. ^p *In God we live, and move, and have our Being*, as well those who contemn God, as those who fear him; as well they who deny his Being, or dispute his Providence, or presumptuously break his laws, as they who acknowledge, adore, and serve him. And is there no way in which he can make men, particularly *good men*, sensible of his presence? without all question there is. It may not be unuseful to mention some of these ways, wherein God can, and often does, give the *pure in heart* a comfortable sense of his presence with them.

I. BY his Providence directing their affairs, and leading them, as it were, by the hand, in ways of peace and safety. ^q *Their steps are ordered by the Lord*; they own his interposition, and themselves to be his charge. Though ^r *he goeth by them and they see him not* with eyes of flesh, though *he worketh on the left hand, and they do not behold him, and hideth himself on the right, that they cannot perceive him*; yet, by reflection, they can plainly enough discern him, they trace his foot-steps, and follow his conduct; they *see God* in the tokens of his care, and can say, "I am well satisfied that God is here, this is his finger; his wisdom and goodness are visible, in making" ing

^p Acts xviii. 28.
xxiii. 8, 9.

^q Psal. xxxvii. 23.

^r Job

“ *ing all things work together for my good ;*
 “ and where wisdom and goodness appear,
 “ I cannot but conclude him to be, whose
 “ *perfections they are.*”

2. By remarkably strengthening their belief of his Omnipresence, working in them a lively persuasion of it, which he preserves unshaken, against all the temptations which assault it on every hand. Their belief is instead of sight, being *the evidence of things not seen*, of an invisible world, and an invisible God. And, as the eye, when, by reason of dimness, it has no distinct view of things, is very much helped by artificial glasses, so, by *faith*, the mind is assisted in presentiating the divine Being. *Faith* and *Knowledge*, are, in common language, opposed, but, in the present case, are esteemed as much the same. *By faith, we know that the worlds were framed by the word of God ;* and by the same *faith*, we know, that God is with us of a truth. The christian's *faith*, though a rational act, is not wholly the effect of reason, but produced in the heart, partly by the operation of a higher cause ; and 'tis this gives the *faith*, concerning God's Omnipresence its stability : for, notwithstanding the arguments which offer themselves to our reason, in behalf of this important article, be strong and convincing,

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yet,

[Heb. xi. 1.

yet, such is the power of sensible things, to turn off our minds from spiritual objects, and corrupt our judgment about them; so prone are we to disbelieve what is not capable of the testimony of sight, and the thing in itself, is so hard to be conceived (I mean, that a Being should, at one and the same time, be in all places) that an actual, steady sense of it, seems to be the gift of God, who, being the *Father of our spirits*, exercises a sovereign dominion over them, establishes in them such convictions of the existence of things which are beyond the sphere of sense, as he pleases, influences their operations, and silences their doubts.

3. GOD discovers his presence with the *pure*, by invigorating the principles of the divine life in them. Whence had they their principles at first? were they not planted by a divine hand? and do not his favourable influences cherish them? how often are evil inclinations restrained, good thoughts suggested, heavenly affections kindled and inflamed? how often is the christian prompted to holy actions, drawn to his duty, restored, quickened, persuaded, and in such a manner, that he would be unjust to the *Spirit of God* to question his agency in the whole? “Yes, O my soul, there is a supreme

“ preme Being who governs the world, and
 “ is present with it ; who takes up his more
 “ special habitation in good men, and is
 “ *nigh to all who call upon him*, to sanctify
 “ and assist them ! Hast thou not felt him,
 “ O my soul, like another soul, actuating
 “ thy faculties, exalting thy views, purify-
 “ ing thy passions, exciting thy graces, and
 “ begetting in thee an abhorrence of sin,
 “ and a love of holiness, and is not all
 “ this an argument of his presence, as truly
 “ as if thou didst see him ?”—In these, not
 to mention other ways, does God give
 the *pure in heart* a comfortable sense of
 his presence with them, which sense of
 the divine presence is called *sight*, because
 that is commonly the way of our knowing
 the presence of outward objects.

3. By *seeing God*, may be understood a
 constant joyous intercourse with him. When
 men converse with men, 'tis face to face,
 they see each other ; from the analogy of
 which manner of conversation, the expres-
 sion of *seeing* is used when men converse
 with God. This intercourse between God
 and holy souls is maintained on their part,
 by *contemplation* and *love*, by *prayer* and
praise, and on his, by the *means of grace*,
 which he has instituted, and the *farther*
measures of grace which he imparts to them.

I. ON

I. ON their part, by *contemplation* and *love*, by *prayer* and *praise*, the saints *have fellowship with the Father*. If you inquire *how*? I answer, in a way suitable to a *spiritual* Being; as is the Being, such is the nature of their fellowship with him. They raise their minds towards God, they fix their thoughts on him, they contemplate his adoreable perfections; and that they may not be interrupted in this holy exercise, they turn away their eyes from beholding vanity, they charge their passions to be silent, and summon up all the force of their soul: their hearts tend towards God, hither they move as to their center, here their affections rest; they are sorry that their bodies should be such a clog to their minds, that they cannot love him more fervently, and serve him more unweariedly, that the stream of their desires should be divided into so many channels; they beg of God to possess and rule them more intirely, to seize all their faculties, and direct all their motions; they offer up their requests to God, spread their wants before him, *call upon his name, shew forth his praise, and tell of all his wondrous works*; they give themselves to these things, *exercise themselves to godliness*, and think no time so well spent, no moments so happy, as the seasons of their converse with God.

2. ON

I John i. 3.

2. ON God's part this communion is kept up by the *means* of *grace* which he has instituted, and the *farther measures* of *grace* which he imparts to them. Don't look upon it, Sirs, as a slight favour, that God has pitch'd his tabernacle among you, and has appointed ordinances of evangelical worship; they are not mere external services, or were not intended to be; they are means of communion with God, in them he meets with his people, and by them, as by golden pipes, feeds their lamps with holy oil. 'Tis your own fault, if you come to religious ordinances, and go away no better and no richer than you came. There must be some obstruction in yourselves which hinders their operation, and shuts up the heart against the influences of the divine *Spirit*. Were you duly prepared, you would ^x *look unto the Lord, and your faces not be ashamed* on account of a disappointment. ^y *O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee, my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary: Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee whilst I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;*
and

^x Ps. xxxiv. 5.^y Ps. lxiii. 1.—

and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. The Psalmist *had seen God in the sanctuary*; he remembers the happy time, and doubts not of seeing him again, were he but restored to the blessed freedom of his house. And in the 68th *Pf.* ver. 24. he speaks of this *sight* of God in the place of his worship, as no peculiar privilege of his, but common to all his people. *They have seen thy goings, O God, even the goings of my God and my King, in the sanctuary.* In Heaven only God is seen to greater perfection. And what this *vision* of God in heaven is, I should now proceed to explain; but before I go farther, it may be of service to prove, from several considerations, that the privilege of *seeing God in this life*, as before explained, is exceeding great, and indeed the chief good and highest felicity to be enjoyed on this side eternity. *Blessed are they who see God*, tho' in this less proper and imperfect manner, because it is the most certain enjoyment of life—the most satisfying—includes in it the hope of perfect happiness hereafter—secures a competency of other good things—communicates a greater value to them—can supply the want or loss of them—supports the mind under the various evils of this world—and fortifies it against the fears of a dissolution.

I. THE *blessedness* resulting from the presence of God and Communion with him, is the most certain enjoyment upon earth; I might have said the only certain enjoyment. All other possessions are extremely precarious, now in this man's hands, and now in another's. To express this inconstancy of the world and its enjoyments, the *beatbens* represented *Fortune*, whom they feign'd to be the disposer of these things, as a *blind* and *fickle* Deity, who frown'd and smil'd, gave and resum'd, advanc'd and disgrac'd, as the humour took her; this was very indifferent *divinity*, but, considered only as a *fable*, is ingenious and instructive. Who is there (especially if he embarks on the sea of business) that does not experience the scene of human affairs, and of his own particular condition, to be variable, that does not gain and lose? sometimes succeed in his desires, and very often meet with disappointment? that is not deceived, where he thought himself surest, and robbed of those things, of which he imagined he had the fastest hold? No enjoyments are certain, but those of religion, and these are truly so; of these none can deprive us, but ourselves; the continuance of our happiness here does not depend upon accidents, which are altogether out of our power; here * *neither moth can*

corrupt,

* Matt. vi. 19.

corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal; violence cannot wrest our treasure from us, nor fraud cheat us of it; we are upon firm ground, we know our terms, and, if we keep to them, shall never be moved: nothing but sin, wilful, presumptuous sin, can divide between God and us; nothing besides can separate us from his love; nothing else can forfeit our title, or dark our evidences. Blessed therefore is the man, whose God is the Lord, who has this infinite Being always nigh to him, to aid, and succour, and comfort him; his happiness is durable, his tenure of it everlasting.

2. THE enjoyment of God is most satisfying. There are a great many pleasures besides this, but no satisfaction. The pleasures of sin are turbulent and disquieting, and the pleasures of sense, whether sinful or not, dry and empty; they play about the surface of the mind, but do not enter deep into it; the hollow within remains unfill'd, and must do so to eternity, if the man has not something more substantial. Of how little value are these pleasures while we are enjoying them, and of how much less upon the reflection! Have they not always an insipid, if not a painful farewell? But the delights which flow from communion with God are divine, they penetrate to the inmost part of the soul, and because they

they please our reason, are therefore perpetually pleasing. Whereas, what is founded in fancy, will please and displease by turns, as the fancy happens to change. What more godlike pleasure can there be, than to survey infinite fulness and perfection? What more contenting, than to be able to add, all this goes to the making up my portion? What so agreeable, as the exercise of a warm and rational devotion towards the Author of my Being? What so refreshing, as to feel his presence enliv'ning all the powers of my nature? If this imperfect state will not admit of the good man's being always in transports, he yet enjoys a repose and serenity, a smooth and cordial joy, which far exceeds all other pleasures. No wonder, therefore, that his language is always this, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there upon earth that I can desire besides thee?* No wonder, that while others cry, *Who will shew us any good?* He saith, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me,* and I will not envy those, whose wine and oil abound with the largest increase. *Let me see thee before I die;* and as good old *b Jacob*, when he received news of the darling of his soul, I will say, *It is enough!*

a Pl. lxxiii. 25. iv. 6.

b Genes. xlv. 28.

3. THE enjoyment which the *pure in heart* have of God in this life, imperfect as it is, involves in it the hope of compleat and eternal happiness hereafter; and this hope, were there nothing else, is preferable to all the possessions of this world. The happiness of the worldling himself consists chiefly in hope; so that even he whose hope is only in this life, would, in the midst of all his enjoyments, be but a miserable man, without the hope of something which he does not enjoy. Suppose a person to have accomplished what he designed and to possess what he desired, he is not therefore absolutely satisfied with his condition; no, but new desires will start up, and he must frame new projects, the hope of succeeding in which, give him more pleasure than the fruition of his former wishes; the reason is, that the world is empty of solid satisfaction, and we are never so effectually convinced of its emptiness as by experience. It is some relief under the discontents that are apt to arise from our present circumstances to be in hopes of something better, but then 'tis a poor relief, when our hopes extend no farther than this mortal life. That which shows the happiness of the true christian is, that he has the hope of a felicity after death, commensurate to the capacity and the duration of his immortal

mortal soul; he hopes to enjoy God, and, and in him, all that can be the object of a reasonable desire. And 'tis not without ground, that the *pure in heart* hopes for this, being, in the temper of his soul, suited to this blessedness, and, in the sanctifying influences of the divine *Spirit*, enjoying the proofs of God's special favour. What he has seen and tasted of the goodness of God, fills him with assurance of joys which he cannot now fully conceive: *experience worketh hope, and his hope maketh not ashamed*; he glories, he rejoices, he triumphs in it, as he has the greatest cause imaginable to do. For O what more excellent than the *object* of his hope, the ever blessed God manifesting himself in the splendour's of his divine attributes! What more firm and stable, than the foundation of this hope, the immutable promise of God! Ah, what a worthless thing is life, destitute of this hope, how sweet and serene is it rendred by it! With this hope in his bosom the good man travels chearfully towards his heavenly home, thro' a thorny and howling wilderness; he is wonderfully reviv'd by the prospect of his journey's end, his future rest, and *with patience runs the race that is set before him.* "May I
" have this hope, and I shall think myself

^c Rom. v. 4, 5.

^d Heb. xii. 1.

“ to have a greater treasure than this world
 “ affords; the affluence of all earthly blef-
 “ sings would not give me half that con-
 “ tentment of heart !”

4. HAPPY is the *pure* in his communion with God in this life, because it secures him a competency of other good things. He who loves God is sure to want no good thing. The great difference between him and other men is, that he is not his own chooser, but this is no way to his disadvantage, since infinite wisdom chooses for him. There is no good man but will heartily join in that resolution of the *Psalmist*, *“ He shall choose our inheritance for us ; and will be glad to be eas’d of the trouble, as well as the danger, which attends being left to our own disposal. He and his cannot be in safer hands. “ He shall dwell on high ; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks ; bread shall be given him, and his waters shall be sure. Providence stands bound for his supply, than which he cannot desire better security. Why should the christian suffer any uneasie thoughts of this kind to arise in his breast ? certainly they ought not to have the least room there. He may be at rest as to both worlds ; as to the world to come he may be so, and much more as to this,*

“ Psal. xlvii. 4.

“ Isai. xxxiii. 16.

this, for he who promises the greater will not withhold the less; nay, he has given thee more, abundantly more, in giving thee pledges of his love, and freedom of access to him. When he so far admits thee into his friendship, as to open his heart unto thee in the gracious promises of his *word*, and to impart to thee, joys which the world knows nothing of, can it be thought he will deny thee what is of incomparably less value? If he denies thee this or that, 'tis because he knows it not to be fit for thee; if he gives thee little, 'tis because thou wouldst not be advantaged by more. Whatever be thy portion of these things, of this thou mayst be confident, that thou hast enough, and that thou shalt always have so. Give thy cares, christian, to the wind, or rather *cast them upon God, who careth for thee.*

5. *SEEING of God*, or experimental religion, communicates a greater value to the enjoyments of this life. Common blessings are no longer common, when we have those greatest of all blessings with them; they afford other pleasures, besides those which flow from the things themselves; and the pleasures they naturally produce, are very much enlarged and improved. A devout intercourse with God cements and refines

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our friendships, exalts our knowledge, raises our conversation, and makes every condition, every way and employment of life, more agreeable, and more useful. Is a person devoted to a life of study and contemplation? this furnishes him with new scenes of wonder, and sheds a more lively and beautiful light upon every object, while, in the man himself, it begets a no less remarkable change, invigorating his faculties, and preparing them for the most divine exercises. Is the christian engaged in a busy and active life? the knowledge he has of God extends his views, fills him with a generous ambition of doing good, and with the most godlike pleasure, as often as opportunities of this kind offer themselves to him. In all his affairs he has regard to the favour of God, and a future immortality. It was a fine complement of the * *Poet* to the Emperor *Augustus*, then absent from *Rome*, that his *return* would be like that of the *spring*, which gives a new face to the world; that while *he* is present

—gratior it dies;

Et soles melius nitent.

“ the day is more grateful, and the sun shines
 “ with more chearful beams.”—This, which is little more than compliment, when applied to any mortal man, is the strict truth with relation to the divine presence, which, as

* *Horat.* Lib. iv. Od. 5. to

to the comfort that attends them, makes a greater change in things, than the *sun* or the *spring* can do. ^h *Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun*; but then is *light sweetest*, when we can consider it as an emblem or resemblance of the universal Being, of God, who is every where present, and does every where carry a quick'ning and chearing influence: then is it *most pleasant to behold the sun*, when, contemplating his lustre, we regard it as a dim shadow, in comparison of the fountain of lights, and look upon him as the *creature* of that God, whose *children* we are. The pious man cannot be in any place or company, employed in any business, or unbending himself in any innocent diversion, but the presence of his God disposes him the better to enjoy himself, his friends, and every thing about him. Divine love is the life of his life, the best seasoning to all human delights, and that which most of all heightens their relish.

6. THE comfort to be had in the presence and favour of God, will most effectually supply the want or loss of earthly comforts; and therefore *blessed is the man who sees God*, as far as he may be seen in this life. The possessions of this world are divided among an infinite number of men, so that few can have such a share of them

as they desire, or even guard what they have : there is no man but may be destitute of what a great many others enjoy, or having once had it, be deprived of it again. The world is mutable, the fashion and the enjoyments of it perpetually changing ; we desire to have, and have not ; or we have, but cannot keep. What shall we do in this case to preserve the quiet of our minds, that we may not be discontented, if we miss of what we promise to ourselves ; nor grieve without measure, if we lose our best lov'd delights ? The way to contentment is short ; be sure that God is yours, and you need not repine, whatever else he withholds or takes from you. This cannot be said of any thing besides the favour of God, that it will make up the absence of all other things. *Health* alone will not satisfy without *friends*, or *estate*, or *credit*, nor these without *health* ; yea, and all these together, with the addition of all those ingredients of a sensual happiness, which the earth can furnish, or the voluptuary devise, will not compensate for the want of one single blessing, I mean the *love of God*. What can he want, who has God for his portion ? What can he have, who has not God ? The former having nothing, *has all things* ; the latter, in the midst of all things, *has nothing* ; for really between the creature and
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the Creator, there is no more proportion, than between *nothing* and *all*. Let the stream dry up, so I have the fountain nigh at hand; while the sun shines, there can be but little need of a candle.

7. THE *privilege* here promised of *seeing God*, will prove the best support under the various evils of life. Sin no sooner entered into the world, but other evils immediately followed. ⁱ *Man is born to trouble*; this is his inheritance instead of *paradise*, which was forfeited by the first transgression. The afflictions and calamities to which we are incident are innumerable, no state, no person is exempted from them. Now since troubles are unavoidable, all left to us, is to provide against them in the best manner we are able. ^k *In the world we shall have trouble*; every man must count on this, and much more every christian. But is there no way to break the blow which we cannot turn aside, and to lighten the burthen which we are oblig'd to bear? Make trial of the remedy I am now recommending, and God himself will be answerable for the success, who has promised to be the *help*, the *strength*, the *refuge* of the good man in time of trouble, and his *deliverer* out of it. To him who hath the presence of God with him, there ariseth light out of dark-

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ness,

ⁱ Job. v. 7.^k John xvi. 33.

ness, peace out of trouble, and joy out of sorrow. " So God be my conductor, I
 " matter not the way in which he leads
 " me, how steep, how rough, how nar-
 " row and toilsome. As long as he sup-
 " ports me, I can support my cross, and
 " take the bitter cup as a cup of blessing,
 " if I have this cordial drop thrown into
 it." Every burthen is light or heavy according to the strength of him who bears it ; what sinks the infant, is hardly felt by the man ; what a person, who is weak and infirm, calls insupportable, one in his full vigour regards as a trifle : he may have reason to complain of the evils he meets, who combats them in his own strength, and in his affliction is destitute of all resource but in himself ; the believer is *strong in the Lord*, from whose presence he derives a supernatural force, which repels all manner of evils, and enables him to overcome the terrors of the world, as well as its more flattering temptations.

8. *THE blessedness* here proposed, fortifies the heart against the fears of a dissolution. There is something terrible in death to creatures who know they must die ; the beasts suffer death without fearing it, because, for want of reason, they have no apprehension of it till it comes ; whereas
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mankind anticipates the evil day many years before it approaches, and ^m *for fear of death are all their life-time subject to bondage*; this is the natural condition of mankind, discontented with life, yet afraid of death: but *grace* put us into a better state, and supplies us with armour of proof, which the darts of this last enemy cannot enter. ⁿ *Tho' I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* After this manner does *David* express his confidence in God. And the *Apostle* yet more triumphantly. ^o *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded that death itself cannot do it.* Over death shall I be more than conqueror, through him that hath loved me. I know, that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, I shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: so that if in this body I groan earnestly, it is not from the thought, that I must be unclothed, but that I may be clothed upon with my house from heaven, that mortality may be swallowed up of life. The only refuge which a great part of mankind have from the dread of death, is in a forgetfulness of it, to which end they busy their minds

^m Heb. ii. 15. ⁿ Ps. xxiii. 4. ^o Rom. viii. 35.—
^p Cor. v. 1.—

minds about a thousand cares or trifles, that there may be no room for the melancholly thought of their last hour. But alas, this is a most miserable relief, to turn our eyes from the danger that threatens us ! There is no preparing for death without thinking of it, and without timely and suitable preparation for death, this end of all the miseries and sorrows of this life, will be but the beginning of greater and more lasting. Nor can we drive the thoughts of death at such a distance, but they will sometimes return into the breast, and bring unspeakable anguish and disquietude with them ; no arts of oblivion will absolutely secure us against these fears. Happy therefore the man who enjoys life, and discharges the business of it, with his eye upon it's last end ; who, every time the thought of death fixes on his mind, does not shrink and tremble, but makes it his familiar companion, and, in his freest entertainments, can admit it for a guest ! The christian, the *pure in heart*, is this happy man, for *the Lord being at his right hand, he is never moved*, not even when his last enemy approaches ; and he receives the same message as ¹ *Hezekiah*, *Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.* " So be it then ; he " that has been my guide in life, will be my
" sup^a

^a Ps. xvi. 8.

¹ 2 Kings xx. 1.

“ support in death ; when I die, I shall
“ live ; when my tongue lies silent in
“ death, my soul shall praise him, and see
“ his salvation after that my eyes are closed
“ forever.”

Thus have I explain'd that *vision of God*,
which is less proper and attainable in this
life, and shewn it to be the greatest hap-
piness that man is capable of enjoying on
this side heaven. The other *vision of God*,
which the saints in light enjoy, I shall treat
of in the next Discourse.





S E R M O N III.

The blessedness of seeing God in
heaven.

MATTH. V. 8.

*Blessed are the pure in heart ; for
they shall see God.*

IN these words we have

I. A very great *privilege* or *blessedness* proposed by our Saviour to his followers.

II. THE *disposition* or *qualification* required for the enjoyment of it.

I. WE have here a very great *privilege* or *blessedness* proposed by our Saviour to his followers, no less than the favour of *seeing God*. In treating this I proposed distinctly to shew you what is meant by *seeing God*,
and

and then to prove, that it is a very great *blessedness*, even the greatest to which a reasonable creature can aspire, to *see* and to *enjoy God*.

THERE is a *twofold vision* of God, one less proper and less perfect, the other more so, one in this life, the other in the life to come; the former was the subject of the preceding Discourse, and I now proceed to treat of the latter; and this also implies *three things*.

I. THE compleatest knowledge of God of which the human nature is capable of, his Being, his Attributes, his Works, all these shall at last be seen in the clearest light; our knowledge shall be more extensive, more distinct, and more full, shall take in a greater compass of objects, discern them with the greatest exactness, and be free from all mixture of error. By the knowledge of God now, the man is distinguished from the beast, and the christian from the man; and, by the perfection of this knowledge, the church triumphant is distinguished from the church militant: the knowledge we have now shall in some sense vanish away, just as a weaker light is no longer perceived, when overwhelmed by a much brighter one. Now *we know in part, and prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then*

that which is in part shall be done away. We are now *children*, in comparison of those who are grown to *the fulness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus*; we *speak as children*, we *understand as children*; but, when we are arrived to the full growth of our faculties, we shall *put away these childish things*. Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know as I am known. In this sublime manner doth St. Paul describe the future *blessedness* of the saints; and all, who shall attain to that world, and to the first resurrection, may put in for their share in this glorious privilege. They also shall *know as they are known*; not in the strict sense of those words, for thus they will agree to no created understanding, not to the highest angels, who, being but *finite*, can never grasp what is *infinite*; but in opposition to that dark, confused, and distant sight, which we now have of these noblest objects. We do not now so much *know God*, as are *known of him*; but then we shall be possessors of the highest assurance that we can desire, both that *God is*, and that *he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*: we shall find him to be such, there shall be no more any seeming disagreement between his attributes, any appearing inconsistency in his
reve-

revelations, any unsurmountable difficulties in his works. *Justice and mercy shall meet and kiss each other*; the holiness, wisdom, and goodness of God shall be alike glorified. In this cloudy state, we are often at a loss how to reconcile one dispensation of Providence with another, or the Providence of God with his perfections and promises; the time is coming when these riddles shall be unfolded, and those things, which we can scarcely allow to be consistent with some of the divine perfections, shall appear to be illustrious demonstrations of them; we shall behold the stamp of God alike imprest on all his works. Our knowledge in that future state will not cost us so much pain and labour, as the acquisition of a little knowledge now does; and at the same time that it is more easy, it will be far more perfect; we shall not guess, but know; we shall not know a few plain things, and be ignorant and mistaken in ten thousand times more, which is the case of men in this state of mortality, but we shall proceed upon the surest ground, and make the swiftest advances in the search of truth. The intellectual world shall lie open before us, with all its rich and inexhaustible stores; and very likely the way of knowledge, in many instances, will not be by *reasoning*, but by *intuition*, or an immediate perception of

of them. Glorious world! happy state! how long shall it be before we get out of this mist of sin and sense! when will that pure light shine upon us! when will the clouds disperse, and the everlasting day break forth in all its brightness! when shall we exchange these perplexing doubts, these wavering uncertainties, these false notions, these unreasonable prejudices, these dim conceptions, for absolute repose, the possession of truth, and freedom, and enlargement of mind, and the clearest vision!

2. THE *beatific vision* of God, implies a consciousness of his presence, very different from what we have now, and much superior to it. ^b *We shall see his face*, which ^c *no man, 'tis said, can see and live.* ^d *With open face we shall behold the glory of the Lord.* There shall be no such veils on the Deity as now conceal him from our view; we shall see, not his *back-parts* only, which he shewed to *Moses*, but his *countenance*; ^e *we shall see him as he is*; in himself, and by his own light, not by *reflection* from his creatures, or *revelation* in his word. God, no doubt, hath other ways of manifesting himself to created minds, and as unlike any he has yet taken, as *seeing* is to *hearing* or *feeling*. And, let it suffice, that these manifesta-

^b Rev. xxii. 4.
iii. 18.

^c Exod. xxxiii. 20.
^e 1 John iii. 2.

^d 2 Cor.

nifestations of God to the blessed spirits of heaven, shall either be by *sight*, or by something equivalent, leaving us no more room to question his presence with us, than we have to dispute the presence of persons whose faces we see, or of things that are most familiar to our eyes; nor, indeed, *so much*. There may, and 'tis highly probable there will be, a *corporeal sight*, though not of God himself, yet of some symbol or token of his presence. The *Shechinah*, or emblem, which he chose under the Old Testament, was a bright cloud; and are we not farther told, that *'he covereth himself with light as with a garment; and dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto?* and why may we not understand these places, as speaking of material light, the splendor of which, aptly enough expresses the glory of the divine Being? Now, as when we see a man, we see only the body not the soul, and yet know the soul to be present by the actions of the body; so may God be said to be where he manifests himself by some sensible glory, and the saints and angels be said *to see him*. With respect to this darling appearance, it is said, that *'Moses was afraid to look upon God*; and in the same sense the *seventy elders saw the God of Israel*. And

¹ Psal. civ. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

² Exod. iii. 6.

xxiv. 10.

then, with our eyes we shall see the glory of God in the person of Christ, for we shall see him as ^h *Isaiab* did on a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filling, not an earthly temple as then, but his heavenly palace. On account of this vision, *Isaiab* is said ⁱ to have seen his glory, which they may much more probably be said to do, who, according to his prayer, shall ^k *be with him* where he is, to behold his glory, even the glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world. And besides this, there is, doubtless, a *spiritual vision*, which the blessed have of God, very properly called by this name. When we behold the objects before us, 'tis the soul sees them, though by means of the body; and cannot the soul, if God please, as well see without a body? cannot spirits converse together, and, by intuition, make known themselves and their thoughts one to another? must they be concealed one from another, unless they are clothed with matter? this, certainly, is very improbable, that spirits should have no knowledge of and communication with one another, but by the intercourse of corporeal organs, which are of a nature perfectly different from theirs. 'Tis really more wonderful, that spirits should perceive the existence of bodies, than that one spirit should,

by
^a *Isa.* vi. 1. ⁱ *John* xii. 41. ^k *John* xvii. 5; 24.

by immediate vision, know that another spirit exists. And if created spirits may communicate by some way or other resembling sight, why may we not suppose that God will reveal himself to favourite souls in some such manner? especially when the communion they shall have with God in heaven, is so often express'd by their *seeing him*. My meaning, in short, is this, that God will so display himself to the soul, that without inferring the Being of a God from the effects of his power, wisdom, and goodness, in the creation and government of the visible or invisible worlds, it shall by an inward perception, be indubitably certain of his existence. What this *spiritual vision* is, 'tis impossible we should now conceive, but, because inconceivable, 'tis not, therefore, incredible, any more than 'tis reasonable for a man born blind, to conclude that there is not a fifth sense, because he hath no such sense, and cannot form any the least notion of it. These heavenly things are of so sublime a nature, that they must be enjoyed in order to be known; so that the happiness of the future state will be perfectly new to us, and infinitely surprizing. These are the things of which ¹St. Paul, speaking of his rapture to the *third heavens*, declares they were *unutterable*; such things as 'tis

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not

not possible to describe, not only because words, but ideas too are wanting; there being no way to explain an unknown thing, but by comparing it to things which are known; and where such resemblances are not to be had, there is no other way but waiting till we shall see the things themselves, which we cannot understand by descriptions. And this is the very truth of the case here, the difference in the way of manifestation to the saints on earth, and to those in heaven, being greater than what is found between God's discovery of himself to the heavenly world by his *works*, and to some parts of it by his *word*; so much greater, indeed, that no resemblance taken from things, we are, as yet, acquainted with, will serve to explain it.

3. THE *beatific vision* includes a constant, joyous intercourse with the divine Being. The *pure in heart*, shall, hereafter, converse with God, and so, 'tis true, they do at present; this converse with God, is as imperfect as they themselves are, confined to certain seasons, and depending upon temper and circumstances, liable to a thousand interruptions and variations, and, at best, low and distant; hereafter, their intercourse with the fountain of life, shall be as near, as perfect, as universal, as lasting, as they can desire, whether it be considered as carried

ried on by acts of contemplation or love. Is it said, concerning the angels, ^m *that they always behold the face of God in heaven?* and to reconcile this with what is elsewhere said, of their being *ministring spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation*, must we suppose, that wherever they are employed by Providence, whether above or below, in this or that part of the world, it makes no difference as to their communion with God, who, being every where present, does to them, every where discover himself in the most immediate manner? we must conceive it to be the same in respect to all happy spirits, be they where they will, visiting the most distant parts of the creation, they still *behold the face of their heavenly Father*. Whatever be the object of their thoughts, they are still thinking of God, still contemplating him; there is an inseparable connection between their view of God, and his works; they are, in a manner, one and the same act, terminating upon the same object, the eternal God, now considered in himself, now in those signatures of his perfections which are impress'd upon his creatures. To converse with God, they need not abstract their minds from other objects, every object is a mirror in which they see him reflected; in acquainting them-

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selves

selves with nature, they acquaint themselves with the God of nature; and, not ceasing for a single moment to exert their faculty of *intellection*, it may be truly affirmed, that they do not for a single moment, cease to exercise this faculty, in meditations on the most excellent of all Beings. To this method of intercourse with God, by acts of the *understanding*, you must remember to add another by acts of *love*, between God and happy souls; on his part of *beneficence* and *complacency* in the highest degree, on theirs of *devotion* and *adherence*, *his* love condescending, *theirs*, though humble, yet aspiring, *his* kind and liberal, *theirs* grateful and acknowledging. “ O, my soul, I cannot forbear reproaching thee with thy
“ little love to so amiable an object! how
“ transcendently great are the divine excellencies, and the divine benefits! how
“ lessening is the sense I have of them! how
“ weak my affection! what is my heart
“ made of, that such attractives work no
“ more upon it! a *heart of stone*, I hope
“ it is not, since it is not without all impression of this love; but ’tis a *heart of*
“ *flesh*, not yet purified and refined enough
“ to be susceptible of all the motions of this
“ excellent passion. It is, however, a comfort to me, in this depression of my mind,
“ and narrowness of my heart, that the
“ time

“ time is coming when I shall love God
“ better, in a manner and degree more suit-
“ able to his perfections and my obligati-
“ ons ; that I shall love with all the force
“ I am capable of, and that nothing shall
“ separate me from his love ; that the flame
“ shall be undecaying, the union indissolu-
“ ble, and the friendship everlasting.” —

And who now can seriously doubt, whether this *vision* be the sovereign good, and final blessedness of man ? no one can doubt it, who has his mind rightly disposed to judge of things of this nature, and will attend to the following considerations.

I. THE super-eminent goodness and perfection of the object, the incomprehensibly great and glorious God, self-existent, and self-sufficient from eternity, alone, yet, completely satisfied, possessing nothing but himself, and wanting nothing ; theater and spectator both, rich in his own fulness, and infinitely pleased with his own beauty ; *without beginning himself*, he did, *in the beginning create the heavens and the earth*, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational Beings, all to demonstrate his power and wisdom, some to celebrate and enjoy his goodness. God is but *one*, his creatures are a *multitude* without number ; their number shows their imperfection, his *unity* is an

argument of his *all-sufficiency*; they are *many*, because they are *finite*, he because *infinite*, is but *one*; they bear some proportion, and admit of various comparisons between themselves, but, in respect of him, they are as *the dust of the ballance*, which cannot turn it one way or other, they are *less than nothing and vanity*. God's having made all things, and comprehending all things, may be supposed to be one reason of its being said, that, *when the end cometh*, or after the resurrection, and the day of judgment, *God shall be all in all* *εἰς πάντα καὶ πάντας*, all things in all persons; he shall be in all angelical and human spirits, who inhabit those bright mansions, diffused through all, as a quickning soul actuating all; he shall be in every one, and every one shall find him to be all, all that they can desire, all that they can conceive; all that is adorable, excellent, kind, and good, they shall find summed up, after a most perfect manner, in one God; all the reasons of existence, all the grounds of truth, all the exemplars of Beings, all the springs of pleasure, all the names of good. The notion of God's being the *τοῦ παντός*, in the gross sense of some pretended Philosophers, which represent him as the *whole collection of Beings*, not as *one Being*, making every thing, even the meanest

est that exists, to be a part of God, is both absurd and blasphemous, destructive of the very idea of God, and a reproach to the human understanding, which could produce and entertain such a monstrous conception. But in the sense I am now speaking of, nothing is more true, than that *God is all*, nothing can be more honourable to God, or happy for his creatures; those, I mean, for whom the enjoyment of God is reserved in another life; since, if God was not all, all things else would prove to be nothing, in proportion to their desires of good, and their capacities of enjoying it; they would have no value, no power to please, having now no other goodness but what God infuses into them, by being *all in all*.

2. THE *vision* of God in heaven, must be acknowledged to be man's greatest and highest happiness, if we consider the faculties of enjoyment, which are the noblest belonging to the human nature, and will be then raised to their utmost perfection. What are the chief distinguishing faculties in man, but those in which he agrees with angels, the *understanding* and *will*; and what the best and most excellent acts of these faculties, but the *knowledge* and the *love of God*? all but the ignorant, will own that there is a wonderful pleasure attending the acquisition of knowledge in this world; 'tis a pleasure,
to

to a rational mind to go in pursuit of truth, especially, when it travels up hill, where its views and prospects are still enlarging; but what is the boasted knowledge of the wise men of this world? a great part is not what it passes for, 'tis *opinion*, not *knowledge*; *error*, not *truth*. Real knowledge is but little, and that little lies mostly in trifles, in useless speculations, or a few matters of fact, in being able to give an account of a great many foolish things, which have been said, or thought, or done by mankind; for with these, and such like matters, is *history stuffed*: such is the knowledge of *mortal* man, little and trifling; whereas, the knowledge of *immortal* spirits, shall be drawn from the fountain of truth itself; they shall *know God* in another manner, and a sublimer degree than they now do, and by knowing him, they shall come to the knowledge of other things. Now their knowledge of God, is, in a great part, collected from his works; the work being first known, and afterwards the Author; then their perfect insight into the nature of the universe, will be owing to the intimate acquaintance they will have with the form of it. Great must be the satisfaction, flowing from such a knowledge as this; how great, 'tis impossible we should conceive, till we are as wise and knowing as the spirits above, whose know-

knowledge has no other bounds but what their own faculties set to it ; as it is not improbable, these boundaries are not for ever the same, but according to the growing nature of their knowledge, are removed to a farther and farther distance. The pleasure too, arising from the regular motion and exercise of the *will*, must be unspeakable. Indeed, almost all pleasure is founded in *love*, which is an act of the *will*, or, at least, supposes it. For why is any object delightful, but because we *love* it, but because the *will* finds in it some reason or foundation for its choice ? This consideration, is alone sufficient to demonstrate the happiness implied in the *love* of God ; for, being the chief good, and containing in himself all degrees, and all kinds of good, when the *will* shall concentrate itself upon him in the most intense acts of *love* and *devotion*, the joy, the transport from hence resulting, may be felt (as they shall be by us hereafter, if we are among the *pure in heart*) but can never be described. That which will help you the better to conceive these truths, is, that as the *understanding* and *will*, are the noblest faculties of our nature, so they shall hereafter be raised to their utmost perfection. Now our minds are weak and narrow, covered with thick darkness, and labouring under manifold prejudices ; then they shall be brightened and purified ; no spot left remaining

maining upon the eye, no imperfection in the sight. Now the *will*, in the very best of men, is corrupted, they do not *follow God fully*, their hearts are divided, and though God have the greater part, and in some sense, the whole, yet it must be confessed with grief, that their affections are too much at the command of other things; neither do they love God with that intireness and fervour, which his excellencies require, and they themselves know to be due to him. In heaven, this contest for the heart of man, between the creature and the Creator, shall be at an end; God shall have all he challenges, the heart shall own his right, rest upon him, cleave to him, delight in him. “*Whom have I in heaven but thee*, will be the language of the holy soul; here is every thing to please, all is lovely and delightful, but ’tis thy presence that makes it to be so: their brightness is but a shadow of thine, their beauty and reflection of thine, their goodness a drop of thine. My heart desires none but thee, and I have what I desire. I have found him whom my soul loves, with whose perfections miriads of blessed spirits are enamoured; we have found him, and we will never let him go.”

3. CONSIDER the perfection of the enjoyment, and you will say, that the *vision or enjoyment* of God, is but another name for

SER. III. *seeing God in heaven.* 77

for the utmost happiness of man. The perfection of the object, and of the faculties we have just considered, let us add, that the perfection of enjoyment, will be answerable to the two former, suitable to the first, and equal to the latter. There may be nothing defective in the faculty, or in the object, and yet the enjoyment will be but incomplete, for want of so near and strict an union between them, as may be conceived possible; but here shall be no ground of complaint upon this head; God shall unveil himself to the mind, open the treasures of his perfections, that he may contemplate, admire, and love him to the extent of his capacities, and with a fulness of delight. Now God shows himself to us in part, and in part hides himself, and he hides more than he discovers; now he gives us only a taste, vouchsafes only a few beams of his light; so it is now, but how different from what it will be hereafter, when he shall discover himself without a cloud, admit us to the fountain head, there to drink our fill of the rivers of his pleasures, and shine upon our souls with all the brightness we are capable of supporting, and we shall then be able to support vastly more than we can now! If this be not to be happy, let any tell me what is happiness, and where it is to be found. "With perfect
"faculties

“ faculties shall I perfectly enjoy the most
 “ perfect Being. O my God, I am al-
 “ most transported out of myself to think
 “ of it ! I should not be able to contain
 “ my joys, my soul would be ready to
 “ burst its prison, nothing would be able
 “ to check my joy and the longings of my
 “ heart after him, were it not for this dis-
 “ stressing doubt, whether so much happi-
 “ ness be designed for me. Is it for me, a
 “ *sinful* creature, to claim this felicity as my
 “ portion ? for me who daily offend my
 “ gracious God, and walk so unworthy of
 “ my expectations from him ? why not, if
 “ he has promised it, and I can say, that
 “ though liable to many infirmities, I
 “ am yet sincere, and do, from my
 “ heart love God, and endeavour to keep
 “ his commandments ?”

4. THINK again, that with the *vision*
 of God, will be joined a freedom from all
 those troublesome, and uneasy perceptions
 which might hinder the fruition, or abate
 the pleasure of it. 'Tis not enough that
 the object, the faculty, and the enjoyment
 be perfect ; in the notion of happiness there
 is further implied, the absence of all those
 things which might call off the mind from
 the object, weaken its force, and divide its
 attention and capacity. 'Tis necessary that
 the soul be at liberty from all disagreeable
 im-

impressions and sensations, that it may employ itself with its whole energy, upon that which is its true felicity. That which would render a person happy, if without interruption, he could apply himself to it, may be prevented in its operation, by things of a contrary nature breaking in upon him, and disturbing him. To one in the gout or stone, how little would it signify to have in his possession such things, as would very much delight and entertain him, if his body were at ease? Not only bodily pain and bodily pleasure, but bodily pain and mental pleasure cannot consist together, where the former is any way violent; all the advantage a man can conceive, even from a good conscience, in this case, is only to be less miserable: I repeat it again, the good man, under violent pains, is only less miserable than another in the same condition; miserable he is for the time, and would be so for ever, were there no prospect of having his pains removed. Or, let us suppose the religious man to be under the denomination of a melancholy temper, which is a frequent infelicity of very good persons in this life, though such a one may have the justest grounds of any man living to be chearful, for want of seeing these grounds, he is not capable of being so; the cloud upon his mind darkens his prospects, and casts

casts a gloom upon all the objects around him. From all this, what can be more obvious, than to conclude, that the happiness designed for man, is not to be enjoyed in this world, because in this world, we shall never be free from the ill influence of things quite opposite to those which make our happiness? I may be religious, in spite of the world; I may obtain the favour of God, though I am not the favourite of the world; yet, if my mind be oppressed or distracted by the cross occurrences of the world, I may have good things, of infinite value in my custody, but shall not be able to enjoy them. There is therefore, a great deal of reason for that distinction of some Philosophers, between *perfection of nature*, and *perfection of life*; the former may be without the latter, and he, who hath nothing wanting to the perfection of his nature, may have a great deal wanting to the felicity of his life: and this may answer what the *Stoicks* have alledged, to prove, that nothing befalling a person, can make him unhappy. Why not? because, say they, it cannot hinder him from being just, prudent, temperate, religious, with which qualities being ennobled, our nature *αρεταϊσιν* has all that belongs to it. True, the man is perfect, but not his happiness, there must consequently be another world, as the gospel

spel assures us there is, where pure minds shall have an untroubled fruition of their chief good, and not be liable to such frequent separations from it as they are now; and this is the ground of the description made of the heavenly felicity in *scripture*, under the notion of rest. *There remaineth a rest for the people of God. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them.* Rest is what we are pretty much strangers to in this mortal life; *perfect* rest is what we never know, but is the privilege of all who are favoured with the *beatific vision*. You will be pleased here, if I enter into some particulars.

I. THE *children of the resurrection*, shall have no disorders of body. The body in this present state, contributes much more to the misery than the happiness of the soul, is perpetually complaining of one malady or other, or giving the soul cause to complain of it; 'tis seldom in the condition wherein we would desire it to be, seldom in a condition to serve the mind in the uses and employments it has for it; it oftener disturbs the mind, and takes it off from its proper work. Who is not, at times, weary of his body? some have more reason to accuse it than others, to whom it is little else than a ve-

^a Heb. iv. 9. Rev. xiv. 13.

hicle of pain. O how gladly would such lay down their load, how gladly put off a garment which fits so uneasy upon them! how gladly part with a body so stuck with thorns! but to all, is it not often a clog, a burthen, a trouble, the cause of many ungrateful sensations; though it be not, as it is to some, a rack to which the soul is bound, that it may be tormented? *Soul, take thine ease*, the body thou now dwellest in, is *not the body that shall be*. This body, with a great many uses to which it is fitted, labours under numberless defects; thy future body shall have all the perfection with which a body can be endowed, shall be *strong, beautiful, active, glorious, incorruptible, not liable to hunger, or thirst, or weariness*, to pains or diseases, blest with perfect health and harmony, and adorned with an everlasting bloom. Such a body as this, we may be allowed to value, it will be a noble structure, a comfortable habitation, a lovely and agreeable partner; but the truth is, of this mortal body, we have more reason to be ashamed, than to glory in it. It is not impossible or improbable, that as some of the low senses and faculties, now belonging to our bodies, will be shut up, so new ones will be opened, by which the soul will receive pleasures,

fures, whereof, at present, it can have no conception.

2. THERE will be no self-dissatisfaction, which is, in some measure, the case with those who have the fairest pretence to be pleased with themselves. Something or other they find in themselves which should not be; alas, there are a thousand things of this kind, a thousand things, either in their temper, or passions, or conduct, which mortify and humble them! Instead of being able to converse with themselves with intire complacency and satisfaction, they are sometimes forced to shun themselves, in order to avoid that disgust, which the sight of their many weakneses and irregularities occasions; instead of keeping up the character of reasonable creatures, and doing nothing but what is becoming that character, they are guilty of a great many foolish, and precipitate, and sinful actions, are continually making work for repentance, for sorrowful and uneasy reflections; instead of being able to appeal, with absolute confidence, to their own minds, or to the all-seeing God, challenging the strictest scrutiny of their hearts and lives, they blush to think of conscience, as a witness to some parts of their behaviour, and much more to think of God as such. It would be bad if it were never to be otherwise, heaven itself,

upon this supposition, would not afford us complete felicity; but otherwise it shall be in that blessed state, where there will be no calls to repentance, because there will be no sin, no disagreement between inclination and duty, no misunderstandings between conscience and us, no ground of disgust with ourselves, because we shall never provoke God to be displeased with us; we shall approve ourselves, be satisfied with ourselves, and this without the imputation of vanity, for we shall approve none but whom God approves, our judgment of ourselves, and delight in ourselves, will agree with the judgment of God concerning us, and the delight he takes in us. This self-satisfaction is a satisfaction in the gifts of God, which we shall freely acknowledge to have received from him, a satisfaction in being subject to God, and dependent upon him. What pleases us in ourselves, will be that we please God.

3. THE saints in light, have no importunate and unsatisfied desires. Of these a vast multitude haunt the bosoms, and break the peace of mortal men; our desires are almost endless, some of them founded upon nature, others upon imagination, some of them capable of being satisfied, others not; and how great is the disquietude they cause to the mind! how seldom does our condition

match

match our desires! how often do we want what nature prompts us to wish for! how much oftener what fancy, and custom, and opinion! Poverty is the lot of many good men, they are frequently in streights; accommodated with few of the conveniencies and pleasures of life; necessaries they have; perhaps, something more; but how hard is it to stop there! how hard, not to desire an affluence and ease of outward circumstances; or desiring it, to be yet intirely easy without it! I question whether such a perfect ease of mind in a mean, unfurnished condition be possible. Resigned the good man is, because he considers himself and his condition, under the disposal of God; but he is not without his desires, if it may please God, of having his condition mended; he is contented, but then his contentment arises more from the temper of his own mind, and the hope of future felicity, than from his outward circumstances. Others, who want for nothing which the world can afford them, yet by their desires of something which they have not, though they hardly know what, are kept from enjoying what they have. This is the fate, or folly of mankind in this life; whereas, 'tis the happiness of the world to come, to be a world of *possession*; no desires shall have room there, but such as shall have their proper

and adequate objects; there will be no such thing as an unreasonable desire; and for all the reasonable desires of holy souls, they shall be provided with a fullness of good things for their satisfaction. The desire and the enjoyment of the thing desired, shall be instantaneous, every desire shall be crowned with fruition; or, if there be any space between one and the other, it shall be only so much as is necessary for the exercise of those active faculties, of which our nature shall be possessed; life shall be made up of an interrupted flow of enjoyments, one arising after another, and perpetually delighting, but never cloying.

4. THERE are no doubts or fears, as to the favour of God towards them, and the security and continuance of their happiness. Is it possible they should doubt of their own love to God, when they burn in the holy flame, and are conscious to themselves that they admire and esteem him above all; that all things are vile in their eyes, the heavens, with all their furniture, the angels, with all their wisdom, and beauty in comparison of him? as little can they doubt of his love to them. Can they doubt of that love which over-flows upon them, fills them with joy unspeakable, supports their Beings, enlarges their hearts, fulfils their desires, and feeds the stream of their pleasures?

sure? they know themselves to be beloved of God, they are as satisfied of it as they are of their own Beings, and they know that he will ever love them; in the immutability of his nature, they see the ground of their immutable felicity. God will never forsake them, never let them cease to be, or to be happy; he will love them with an everlasting love. Ah, if the militant christian had but this assurance, if he could but say, "I am sure he is mine—I read my name in the book of life—I am one of those who shall go away into life eternal—" he would despise life and brave death; whatever were his condition, he would think himself happy, and rejoice evermore. But, alas, he knows not, sometimes, what to conclude, he is wavering in his opinion of himself, if not ready to condemn himself; his sun is eclipsed, and he loses sight of God! It has pleased God, that his servants should, for a time, be subject to these vicissitudes, and live in a state of doubt and fear; but 'tis only for a time, heaven will put an end to all our fears, and we shall, in some sense, have the joy of eternity contracted into every moment, because we shall every moment, have a clear and undoubted persuasion that our joys shall be eternal.

5. THERE we shall not suffer by the infelicities of others. A great part of the

unhappiness of this life comes by sympathy; our kindness for others, gives us an interest in what befalls them; we bear their burthens, we soften at their complaints, we weep over their tears, and eccho to their groans. The ties of blood, the endearments of society, and the relation, and the communications of friendship, if they extend the sphere of our joys, they do also entitle us to sorrows not our own. And in such a world as this, where afflictive events are so common, where there is so much imprudence, and folly, and sin, such disorders in families, such distractions in societies, such frequent ravages of sickness and death, how are the sorrows of our hearts by these means enlarged! should we escape pretty well in our now persons and affairs, 'tis much, if we do not suffer at second hand, and by our alliances with others. 'Tis well for us, that the felicity of the heavenly state will not be thus precarious, have no such alloy; the society of yonder world, is composed all of happy persons, never shall there occur one wretched object to strike our passions with a jarring and disagreeable motion; like rivers which communicate, our joys shall flow from breast to breast, and the joy of one be the joy of all. And, as for the damned world, there is a *great gulph fixed* between them and the mansions of glory;

nor

nor shall what the wicked suffer, in the least affect the blessedness of the righteous. They who were once as dear to me as my own soul; they for whom I could have died, so tenderly did I love them, may be in that unhappy number, separated from me at the distance of hell from heaven; but they will be nothing to me then, for I shall have put off all those fond attachments, by which I now find my soul glued to some persons, and shall acquiesce in that righteous sentence, which dooms my nearest relatives, and best loved friends, to everlasting destruction; their misery is no diminution to the happiness of the divine nature, and will be no more to mine, when I shall be no longer governed by *instinct* but *reason*, and have my will entirely conformed to the will of God.—This is the *fourth* consideration, with the *vision* of God is joined an absolute freedom from all those troublesome and uneasy perceptions, which might hinder the fruition, or abate the pleasure of it.

6. CONSIDER yet again, that the *vision* of God will be transforming. '*When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*' With good reason, therefore, is it said, *it is not yet known what we shall be*; for who now knows what it is to be *like God*, to be like him in intellectual
and

and moral perfection, in holiness, felicity, and glory? So much 'tis natural to conclude with the *Psalmist*, *'that we shall be satisfied when we awake with his likeness.* Expect not, that I should explain to you, how this assimilation is produced; whether the sight of the divine excellencies awakens such strong sentiments of admiration and love in us, as oblige us with the whole strength of our nature, to endeavour to imitate him; or with the sight of God, there be an efflux from him, a secret power which changes us into his image, *from glory to glory*; whether either, or both of these, or some other thing, be meant by the inspired writer, when he saith, *that we shall be like him, because we shall see him,* 'tis not for me to determine; perhaps, that ~~writer~~ himself, did not clearly conceive in what particular way this influence should be conveyed. 'Tis certain, that men are very much as the objects are they converse with; when these are base and low, they become the same; when they are great, excellent, and sublime, they grow into generous dispositions, and a sublimity of thought. We may well suppose, so transcendent an object as the blessed God, when immediately beheld, will have a more considerable effect, and like fire, convert what it touches into
to

to its own nature. Now, should mine eyes see him as " *Job's* did, like *Job*, I should *abhor myself in dust and ashes*; then shall I gaze upon him with infinite pleasure, because I shall be like him; and by gazing on his loveliness, become myself still more and more lovely.——To conclude.

7. REFLECT yet once more, that God is not merely the *object* of the future felicity, but the *author* of it too. *Seeing of God*, is an act of the soul, and we cannot imagine that the soul will have no other pleasures, but what result from an act of its own. 'Tis not credible, that the soul alone should be active, and God only offer himself as the object of its contemplations: let us carry our thoughts farther than this, since the reason of the thing invites us farther; let us conceive of a vital energy continually proceeding from God, not unperceived by us now, but attended with the most exquisite perceptions. Every influence will produce ineffable delight. He made the soul, he understands its frame, he can make pleasures rise up in it like those bubbling springs, which break out of the earth, and preserve its face fresh and verdent; he can communicate happiness to it by all its faculties, not merely such a happiness as follows upon the natural exercise of those faculties, but a happiness which is caused by

by the *impressions* he makes on them. It is an article of faith *that God influences the souls of good men*, they are persuaded of it, but it is upon the testimony of scripture, and because of the effects, rather than by an immediate knowledge, or sensible experience. As the Author of our Being *can*, so there is little question to be made, that he hereafter *will* operate upon our spirits in such a manner, that we shall be conscious to his operations, shall feel them as we do the stirrings of our own passions, and feel those delights accompanying them, which none but a God can give.

THUS have I proved the happiness intended by the *vision* of God, to be the highest we are capable of, the utmost end of man. And now let me ask you, Do you believe this doctrine? I have given you the scripture account of happiness; but what are your thoughts of it? do they agree with the description here given of true felicity? there is a great deal depending on the answer you return to this question; for, according as you can answer in the affirmative or negative, you may form some judgment of the temper of your own hearts. But then, observe, you must answer sincerely; you may force yourselves to say, that the chief happiness of man is to *see* and *enjoy* God; you may teach your tongues such language,

language, and having been often told so much, may flatter yourselves that you believe it. Ah, christians, will you thus deceive yourselves? examine your inward sense of things, examine your inclinations, feel how your hearts beat, and then let us know your judgment. I fear too many must answer, that they apprehend not wherein the mighty happiness lies of being for ever in the presence of God, for ever employed in acts of adoration, and praise, and love. I fear, were they to show us the very bottom of their hearts, we should find the happiness of the world so great (as painted there) and the happiness of religion so little, that in case we judged of them by this proportion, we must prefer earth to heaven, and a sensual felicity, and the paradise of *Mahomet*, to the *vision* of God, and the third heavens. By your thoughts, you may come to have some knowledge of your taste, and by your taste, may know whether your souls are renewed or not. *The carnal mind is enmity against God*; and according to its enmity against God, is the enmity which it has to a felicity founded in his friendship and likeness; it disrelishes, it secretly contemns it. Could it have its wish, that wish would be to enjoy an immortality of fleshly delights, the further removed from God the better.

Let

Let not such imagine the *beatific vision* is for them, that this is to be their happiness hereafter, which, at present, they can hardly allow to be any happiness at all; their tempers must be exceedingly changed before they will be fit to partake of so divine a portion. But you, holy souls, who prize the enjoyment of God as the top of all happiness, and prize the christian religion for this very reason, that it gives you the discovery and the promise of this happiness, you who had now rather be religious than worldly, wise or great, rather have the presence, and favour of God, though you "*suffer affliction with his people, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*"; to you I may venture to speak comfort; you, in the name of God, I bid to be of good cheer; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; you have the temper of heaven and happiness; you shall see God, for you are *pure in heart*.—This minds me of the next general head.

II. *THE disposition* required for the enjoyment of this happiness; and of this in the following Discourse.

* Heb. xi. 25.

S E R.



S E R M O N IV.

The character of the pure in heart
represented.

MATTH. V. 8.

*Blessed are the pure in heart ; for
they shall see God.*

IN a preceding Discourse on these words
I proposed,

I. To explain this very great *privilege* promised by our Saviour to his followers, the *vision* of God, and to show that it is the highest happiness of man ; this I have dispatched, and I am now,

II. To show that the *pure in heart*, and they only, *shall see God*.—Here these two things are to be done.

I. I

I. I must explain what is meant by *purity of heart*; and

II. SHEW that the *pure in heart*, and they only, *shall see God*.

I. IN explaining *purity of heart* I shall enquire into the signification of the word *purity*, and then consider more particularly the seat of this *purity* here assigned. As to the signification of the word, *purity* stands opposed to mixture, or to pollution; in the former sense, the *purity* here intended bespeaks *sincerity*, in opposition to *hypocrisy*; in the latter *holiness*, in opposition to *moral defilement*.

I. *Purity* is opposed to mixture. Thus, we read of ^a *pure gold*, χρυσιον καθαρον, the same word which is rendered *pure* in the Text. Pure gold, is gold well purged from oar, and without the alloy of other metals. In this sense, *purity of heart* signifies *sincerity*, in opposition to *hypocrisy*. Mixtures there are in the very best of saints, of corruption with grace, of earthly with heavenly desires, of self-love, and the love of the world, with the love of God. Indeed, God tells the people of *Judah*, that ^b *he would purely purge away their dross, and take away all their tin*;

^a Rev. xxi. 21.

^b Isai. i. 25.

tin; but this, if apply'd to particular persons, must be understood in a qualified sense, because ^c *there is no man that liveth, and sinneth not*; perfection is the privilege of heaven. However the righteousness of good men is so far without mixture, as to denominate them *evangelically* perfect; there are no such mixtures as would argue them to be without the *grace of God in truth*. Grace is their reigning and victorious principle, heaven, is by far, preferred to earth, and the Creator to his creatures; they are, upon the the whole, ^d *upright before God, Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile*; they do not act a part in the world, but are really, and at the bottom, what they pretend to be; they are *sincere* in their conversation with men, not ^e *double-tongu'd, nor double-hearted*; they do not *bless with their mouths, and curse inwardly*, speak one thing, and mean another, profess one thing, and believe another, promise one thing, and perform another; they use all the frankness and openness consistent with common prudence, having no arts of concealment but for their own defence, not to the prejudice of others. The * *Roman historian* tells us of "one *Drusus*, who being about to build a house, and the architect offering, if he thought

^c 1 Kings viii. 46. ^d Psal. xix. 13. John i. 47.
^e 1 Tim. iii. 8. Psal. xii. 2. * *Vell. Paterculus.*

“ fit, to contrive it so that he might enjoy
 “ the utmost secrecy in it, and no one be
 “ able to look in and see what was done
 “ there; rather, said he, if you have any
 “ such extraordinary art, order it so, that
 “ whatever I do all my fellow-citizens may
 “ know it.”—This he produces as an argu-
 ment of the plain-heartedness and integrity of
 the man. But this, I doubt, was carrying
 a virtue to an excess. ’Tis enough that
 the sincere man abhors all wickedness and
 deceit, has never recourse to fraud and arti-
 fice in his dealings, hides not what ought to
 be discovered, nor makes an empty show
 in order to lead others into a false opinion
 of him and his intentions; he ^f *loves man-*
kind and his fellow-christians out of a pure
heart; or, as it is expressed in another place,
^s *without dissimulation*; he knows not what
 it is to *love in word only*, to put men off
 with barren appearances, or to make pro-
 mises of kindness when mischief is in his
 heart: the *pure in heart* are further sincere,
 where it most concerns them to be so, in
 religion, and in all their transactions with
 God; their *heart*, according to the scripture
 expression, is ^h *right with God*, their religi-
 on is not a piece of solemn mockery, like
 theirs, of whom the *prophet* speaks who
 draw

^f 1 Tim. i. 5.
^s Rom. xii. 9.

^h Acts

viii. 25,

SER. IV. *pure in heart represented.* 99

ⁱ draw near to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him, going after their covetousness. ^k They call upon the Lord out of a pure heart; they worship him in sincerity, having all that esteem, and reverence, and love, and trust which they profess to have; are religious, not only where the world is judge of their behaviour, but in their most secret retirements; not to serve a turn, and promote some worldly interest and design, but for the sake of God, and an unseen world, not in a calm only, but in a storm, and when their virtue and integrity is most strongly tried: they can appeal to God as the Psalmist does, ^l Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Or as Peter to his divine master, ^m Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. Ah, how easy is it to deceive men, and to how little purpose, unless we could deceive God too, which is impossible! 'tis not whom the world saints, nor the church neither, they may be both mistaken, but whom God shall number with his people, when he shall give forth the decree, gather my saints together unto me. " O sincerity, thou amiable virtue, esteemed by

H 2

" men,

^l Matt. xv. 8.
cxxxix, 23, 24.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 22.
^m John xxi. 17.

^l Psal.

“men, and lovely in the sight of God!
 “without thee a good action has nothing
 “of value, virtue nothing of beauty, reli-
 “gion nothing of truth! without thee in-
 “deed there is no such thing as religion, as
 “virtue, or as a good action!”—God grant
 that while we praise it we may not be des-
 titute of it, nor admire what we do not
 care to practise.

2. *Purity* is opposed to pollution, and in
 this sense the *purity* here intended signifies
 holiness, in opposition to moral pollution.
 Agreeably to this interpretation we read of
 “*pure water*, i. e. not foul’d or muddied;
 a holy life is like a clear and limpid stream,
 which keeps itself fine by running, and is
 equally fitted to please the eye and to cool
 the thirst. To the same sense is *Rev. xix. 8.*
to her, the church, was granted, that she
should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;
for the fine linnen is the righteousness of
saints. White was always reckoned an
 emblem of *purity*, and must be so us’d here,
 because this *fine linen* is said to be *clean*
 as well as *white*, and to represent the *right-*
eousness of the saints. All sin is of a de-
 filing nature, it pollutes the soul more than
 any thing material can the body; therefore
 this quality is ascribed to it in scripture,
 and it is made the character of wicked
 men.

SER. IV. *pure in heart represented.* 101

men. ° *They are all gone astray, they are altogether become filthy. And he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.* The covetous is of the earth earthy, and how can he who is perpetually digging in the earth preserve himself clean? The telling of money does not a thousand times so much foul the fingers, as the love of money does the mind. Sensual lusts, or those which have carnal pleasures for their objects are still more defiling, upon this account it has been usual to represent the sensualist by a creature remarkable for its filthiness. The scripture agrees with heathen authors in the use of this similitude. ° *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. For if after they have escap'd the pollutions of the world thro' the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. But it is happened unto them according to the true Proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was wash'd to her wallowing in the mire.* It may well make the sensual sinner blush to see this picture of himself, and to reflect that the world has been universally of the opinion, that it exactly

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resembles

° Psal. xiv. 3. Rev. xxii. 11. ° 2 Pet. ii. 19.—

resembles him. In opposition to this moral turpitude the character of the true christian is to be holy; holiness is their name, their dress, their complexion, their very life and essence; they are ^p *holy in all manner of conversation*; they have learnt ^r *to possess their vessels in sanctification and honour, not in the lusts of concupiscence as the Gentiles who know not God.* The affectation of any thing is indeed nauseous, and of the best things worse than of others; thus this very name by which the gospel characterises christians became at last a title for some antient *hereticks*, who call'd themselves *καθαροί pure*, refusing to communicate with such as thro' weakness had lapsed under persecution tho' afterwards penitent; and in token of their extraordinary sanctity going clad in white garments. To one who was a *Bishop* among these men *Constantine* said very well, "why don't you make you a ladder, and go to heaven by yourselves?" The christian is really *pure* without making an ostentation of being so, and glorying in his pre-eminence above others; he is not at all fond of needless and trifling distinctions in garb or language, or any indifferent customs, contented to be substantially holy, not that he may be singular, (tho' as the world goes there is no greater singularity than this) but

^a 1 Pet. i. 15.

^r 1 Thess. iv. 4.

but that by *purity* of heart and life he may be entitled to the favour and enjoymēt of God. Thus you see that *purity* as it stands oppos'd to *mixture* or to *pollution* in the former sense, signifies *sincerity* as oppos'd to *hypocrisy*, in the latter, *holiness* in opposition to *moral defilement*.—I shall now, as I propos'd, consider the seat of this *purity*, *the heart*; *blessed are the pure in heart*. The *heart* is in general the same as the *inward man*, the soul the reasonable and immortal part; here resides that *purity* which the gospel commands, and which alone is deserving of that name. *Evangelical purity* is stil'd *purity of heart* on these following accounts.

1. To distinguish it from *fæderal purity*. All who are in the church and covenant of God, and thereby separated from the rest of mankind are *holy*, being taken from the common lump, and solemnly appropriated to the service of the one true God. Thus the antient *Jews* were a *holy people*. Among other places consult *Deut. vii. 6.* where you find their being a *holy people* explain'd in this sense; *for thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God has chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.* They were a *holy* because a *special people*, inclos'd by a covenant of peculiarity, which like a middle

wall of partition divided them from the *gentile* world; hence they came to value themselves upon their being the *seed of Abraham*, and look'd upon all who were not of their religion, as in a state of *defilement*. Thus the believers of the circumcision thought *who contended with Peter for going unto men that were uncircumcised, and eating with them*. And under the same prejudice the Apostle *Peter* himself laboured, till God by a vision from heaven instructed him better, telling him that *what God had cleansed he should not call common or unclean**. God had now cleansed the *gentiles* as he formerly did the *jews*, by taking them into his covenant. 'Tis for this reason the children of *christian* parents are accounted *holy*, *The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife; and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy*. Did neither of the parents belong to the *christian* church, their children would be to God as the children of the *Ethiopian*; but the parent being in covenant the children are regarded as a *holy seed*, are the disciples of Christ, have a right to the *seal* of the covenant, and unless they forfeit them, to the blessings of it too,

as

† Acts xi. 2, 3. *†* Acts x. 15. *** That common and unclean signifie the same, and how they came to do so. *Vid.* Heb. ix. 13. and Grot. in loc. *‡* 1 Cor. vii. 14.

as they become capable thereof. *Baptism* is a kind of *regeneration*. * *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* It naturalises our children, making them subjects of the redeemer's kingdom. Too many I doubt lay more stress than they ought upon this *fæderal purity*, expecting great matters from their *baptism*, and because they bear the *christian* name, imagining that they cannot fail of salvation; than which there cannot be a greater delusion. For alas, the covenant will not save but condemn those who walk contrary to the rules of it! *Fæderal holiness* by itself is no more than an external denomination; *baptism* no better than an empty sign. * *Noah's ark* is indeed made a figure of *baptism*, so that as in that eight souls were saved by water, *baptism* does also now save us. But how? *not by the putting away the filth of the flesh, but by the answer of a good conscience towards God.* What the *Apostle* saith of the *Jews* and of *circumcision* may be applied to *christians* in respect of *baptism*; † *he is not a Jew that is one outwardly &c.* with equal reason we may say, *he is not a christian that is one outwardly, neither is that baptism which is outward of the flesh; but he is a christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart*

* John iii. 5. † 1 Pet. iii. 20—‡ Rom. ii. 28—

heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of man but of God. Not that baptism is therefore to be neglected any more now than circumcision was then; (tho' we know this is the way in which some weak people argue) but tho' baptism is undoubtedly a gospel ordinance, and it be a great privilege to be devoted to God in this sacrament, yet we must not rely upon this, but build our hopes of salvation upon the evidence we have of the purity of our hearts.

2. *Purity of heart is so called to distinguish it from legal purity. ² The law could not make the comers thereunto perfect, but it made them pure. The law stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings and carnal ordinances; it taught people to distinguish between things, as some of them clean and others unclean, and according as they did or did not observe this difference, they themselves were reckoned clean or unclean; but then the purity or pollution deriv'd from these things was only typical, these ritual observances were impos'd no longer than ² till the times of reformation; and like the blood of bulls and of goats, they sanctified only to the purifying of the flesh. Christ is the great reformer of the church, who has brought in a better way, and establish'd things according*

² Heb. x. 1, 9, 9.

² Heb. ix. 10, 13.

according to a more perfect and heavenly pattern. In the room of *legal purity* he has substituted *purity of heart*; this is the doctrine he inculcates upon his hearers. ^b *And he called the multitude and said unto them, bear and understand*; implying, that what he was going to say to them was a matter of very great importance, and such as their prejudices would not let them easily apprehend. *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.* And when his disciples took notice to him that in saying this he offended the *Pharisees*, and that they themselves did not very well conceive his meaning, he replies, *let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind*; and in the 17th and following verses, *do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entreth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which come out of the mouth proceed forth from the heart, and they defile the man: for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murthers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies, these are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.* To this excess of foolish superstition had this hypocritical generation of men carried the matter, making it one of the most deadly sins to

^b Matt. xy. 10, 11.

to sit down at table without first having wash'd their hands; while using these very hands as the instruments of unrighteousness, or leaving their hearts full of all kinds of impurity, past for a mere trifle. So the great *Apostle* of the *gentiles* and asserter of christian liberty tells the *Romans*, that *he knew and was persuaded by the Lord Jesus, i. e. by the laws of the gospel dispensation, there is nothing unclean of itself; tho', as he adds, to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean: in like manner to those who think themselves bound to abstain^d from things strangled and from blood we may say, to you who esteem these things to be unclean they are unclean; but in itself there is nothing unclean; this prohibition was only temporary, and designed for the christians of those times, whose circumstances were peculiar, and who that they might not give offence to jew or gentile, were obliged to a great reserve in their conduct; whereas now that this reason is ceas'd, the injunction is ceas'd with it, and that canon of St. Paul takes place in its full latitude; *Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.* Are we ourselves pure?*

if

^a Rom. xiv. 14. ^d Acts xv. 28, 29. ^e 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

if so, all things else are *pure*. We have nothing to concern ourselves about now but this *inward purity*. 'Tis not the practising of voluntary austerities, or being subject to ordinances, *touch not, taste not, handle not*; persons who place their religion in such bodily exercises *know not what spirit they are of*; they are more the followers of *Moses* than of *Christ*, and revive *Judaism* instead of studying the genius and design of the *gospel*, which every where commands, and insists upon *purity* of heart and life.

3. THE *heart* is made the seat of this *purity*, to distinguish it from a ceremonious shew of religion. It has been common, in most ages of the church, for *ceremony* to usurp the place of *solid piety*, and multiplying the ornaments and circumstances of worship, to be mistaken for the *spirit* of devotion. In the first times of christianity, there was indeed a great simplicity of *doctrine* and *worship*, joined with an equal *purity* of manners; the way was not yet found out of adorning the *gospel* by magnificent temples, fine paintings, rich vestments, by choirs, organs, altar-pieces, copes and mitres; a *pure heart* was then accounted the *most acceptable offering* to God, and a *holy life* the greatest ornament to religion; but alas, how soon did this simplicity degenerate,

nerate, and things take another face! and it is very observable, that as the *power of godliness* declined, those *artificial forms* came into esteem and reputation; for men must have religion, or something that looks like it; when they have religion itself, they are less solicitous for these vain and childish amusements; but, when there is little left of that religion which is *pure and undefiled before God*, then they set their heads on work to supply the place of it by glittering appearances, and turn the *church* into a *play-house*. In the opinion of some, the *christian church* never made so glorious a figure as in the days of *Constantine*, when the riches and honours of the world were brought into it; and instead of that plain habit, and those mournful weeds, which it had worn till then, it appear'd in the most expensive and gorgeous dress. This pomp of religion dazzles some weak minds, who do not consider that serious practical religion never received a greater blow, than it did at that time; that to this source we are chiefly to trace the corruptions, which afterwards increased to such a prodigious degree; when faction and ambition seized the *clergy*, and both *clergy* and *people* sunk into a sensual and worldly way of living; their zeal run out into rites and ceremonies, which,

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which, for their number, were so tiresome, that * *Austin* complains, " that they were " less tolerable, than the yoke of the Jews " under the law." This was handed down for *pure religion* through several ages, even home to the *Reformation*, and, God knows, passes for such now among too many. The *church* of *Rome*, at the same time that it was the sink of all impurities and abominations, and the mother of harlots, was not wanting in these outward shews. A learned man of their own communion, † *Agrippa*, calls the doctors of their church, " blind " guides, a generation of vipers, whited " sepulchres, who, in their mitres, caps, " hoods, and habits, made a shew of holiness, but within are full of filthiness, " hypocrisy, iniquity, gluttons, gamesters, " whoremongers, wizards;" and yet, saith he, " a man may not contradict their decrees, unless he intends to be burnt for " it." That the ignorant *vulgar* should be taken with this idle pageantry, and reckon it the *beauty of holiness* and of divine worship, is not so strange; but that men of sense and reason, that *divines*, *reformed divines* should fall into the same error, is, I confess, what I can hardly account for. ‡ *Queen Elizabeth*, being one who loved pomp

* *Epist.* 19.
mation, p. 27.

† *Vid.* *Bennet's Memor. of Reformation*, p. 90.

pomp and finery in religion, and always expressed a greater inclination to gratify the *Papists* than the *Puritans*, did accordingly model ecclesiastical matters to the gust of the former ; and *Dr. Heylin* is so mightily smitten with the beauty of the church of *England*, as then trick'd up, that he cannot forbear crying out, “ Behold, the bishops
“ never appearing publickly, but in their
“ rochets, never officiating otherwise than
“ in copes at the high altar ; the priests
“ never executing any divine office, but in
“ their surplice ; the festivals preserv'd in
“ their former dignity, observ'd with their
“ distinct offices, and celebrated with a religious
“ concourse of all sorts of people ;
“ the weekly fasts, the holy time of Lent,
“ the Ember-weeks, together with the fast
“ of the Rogation, severally kept by a forbearance of all kinds of flesh ; the holy
“ table seated in the place of the altar ; the
“ people making their due reverence at
“ their entrance into the church, kneeling
“ at the communion, and standing up at
“ the creed ; music restored in the churches,
“ &c.—This, 'tis to be hoped, was doing things *decently, and in order*. God cannot but be highly pleased to be so honoured and complemented ; for these are the things which the imaginations of men are struck with, and they think, *that God is altogether such*

such a one as themselves; and out of his great regard to the *ceremonious* part of religion, will hardly accept *purity of heart* without it; 'tis well if they don't fancy the former to be the more essential, if not the only essential part of piety. Will men never learn to think more honourably of the blessed God? I say honourably; for really we cannot reproach God more, than by supposing he is such a lover of gaudy shews, and respects the shadow more than the substance. Has not our Saviour told us, that *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*? that *they who worship God, must worship him in spirit and in truth*? A proper reverence there ought no doubt to be in the outward demeanour, as expressive of the devotion of the mind; and such a reverence there may be without running into foppery, and making the worship of God look like an entertainment of the theatre.

4. The *heart* is made the seat of this *purity*, to distinguish it from that *purity* which is confined to the outward conversation. This latter is in the scripture stiled, the *cleanness of the hands*, and always accompanies the former, which is the reason of its being made the condition of our acceptance with God in the worship which

^f John iv. 24.

^s Ps. xviii. 20.

we pay him. ^h *I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord!* And I will, saith the *Apostle*, ⁱ *that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* 'Tis a vain thing for people to talk of the goodness of their *hearts*, when they lead wicked and ungodly *lives*: cleanse the fountain, and the streams will be pure also: but tho', where there is *purity* of heart, *purity* of life still attends it, as an inseparable companion, and, in this case, is no less pleasing in the sight of God, than it is in the eyes of men, yet, when it is found alone it has nothing of value in it. They are therefore both joined together by St. *James*, ^k *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you; cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double-minded*; intimating that 'tis to no purpose for us to draw nigh to God with our hands cleansed, if our hearts are not the same. A good life is a most amiable thing, and the more amiable for being uncommon, having the appearance of a lilly among thorns. But who shall know whether the life be truly good? God. The actions may, for the matter of them, be good, while the principle they flow from is far otherwise. *The altar sanctified the gift*, and the heart sanctifies the life. It is not impossible, that a man,
by

^h Pl. xxvi. 6. ⁱ 1 Tim. ii. 8. ^k James iv. 8.

by the arts of hypocrisy, or from a concern for his reputation or interest, may keep himself from the *pollutions that are in the world through lust*; may, for the greater part, be inoffensive and unblameable in his conversation, and yet may come short of the kingdom of heaven, being wanting in the secret part of religion and virtue, not being *renewed in the spirit of his mind*, his heart not being purified. The productions of art or nature may imitate *grace*, as a picture may the life, but can never come up to it; the difference between some nominal and real christians, may to appearance be little, but in reality is very great; for when one makes clean only the *outside* of the vessel, the other makes clean the *inside* also; while one has only the body of religion, and that not intire, the other has that body animated by a vital principle of faith, hope, and charity.

5. The *heart* is represented as the seat of *purity* to signify, that all the powers and faculties of the reasonable soul must be *pure*. By the *heart* in scripture, sometimes one of these is meant, sometimes more, sometimes all, as 'tis certain they are in the Text.—The *mind and imagination, conscience, the will* and the *affections*, are to be the subjects of this *purity*.

1. The *mind and imagination* must be *pure*. The christian must *abhor that which*

is evil, not only in the *practice*, but in the *speculation*; not only in the *deed*, but in the *thought*. He, who makes no scruple of entertaining himself with sinful imaginations; he, whose fancy is a scene of wickedness and sensuality, is very far from preserving his heart so *pure* as he ought; for how can the heart be *pure*, which is full of such thoughts? the heart includes the *imagination*, and there is no doubt, that the soul contracts a great deal of defilement this way: here lust is first conceived, according to that of our Saviour, ¹ *He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart*; and after ^m *lust is conceived*, it is much, when there is opportunity and strong temptation, if it does not *bring forth sin*, the sinful act; as *sin when it is finished* by a habit and course of evil actions, *bringeth forth death*. The heart of an impure person is very properly called the *Devil's shop*, where the *imagination* is the *anvil* on which he forges the weapons of hostility against God. They who are sanctified throughout, have purged the temple of idols, and consecrated it to the living God. Every good man will carefully guard his mind from evil thoughts, being sensible that they cannot be lodg'd there without leaving a stain behind them; so

¹ Matt. v. 28.^m James i. 15.

so the pious *Psalmist*, ^m *I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.* The law of God forbids all such thoughts, and whoever loves the one, cannot but hate the other. Some reckon it a mighty atchievement, if they abstain from the grosser acts of wickedness, tho' many times the reason of this is nothing else but the fear of a discovery. But let this, or any thing else be the cause of their seeming innocence, it still remains to be inquired, whether they do not roll the idea in their minds, as they do a pleasing morsel in their mouths, and freely and delightfully indulge to the imagination of that, which, not from a respect to the divine law, but some other consideration, they dare not outwardly commit. In this case they do but deceive themselves, to think they are *pure and innocent.*

2. *Conscience* must be kept *pure.* We read of a ⁿ *pure conscience*; *holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*; and of ^{*} *a conscience that is defiled.* A *pure conscience* is the same as a *good conscience*, which is the more general name for it; and a *defiled conscience* the same as an *evil one.* Wilful sin defiles the conscience; yea, tho' the conscience be mistaken, or doubting, and I do what I think to be unlawful, or doubt whether it be not, my conscience is

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hereby

^m Ps. cxix. 113.ⁿ 1 Tim. iii. 9.^{*} Tit. i. 15.

hereby polluted. This is the *Apostle's* decision concerning things offered to idols; ^p *for tho' an idol be nothing in the world; yet since there is not this knowledge in all, they who with conscience of the idol, eat any thing as offered to the idol, are herein guilty before God, and their weak conscience is defiled.* Observe here, that the contrary to what defiles the conscience, is not enough to denominate it *pure*. Whoever acts against an ignorant or erroneous conscience, defiles it; but it does not therefore follow, that when we act according to the dictates of our conscience it is then *pure*; no, a *pure* conscience must be rightly informed, at least in the chief points of God's law; for conscience is to be a copy of the law, and where it is not, we may at the same time follow our consciences, and transgress the law; now a transgressor of the law cannot be a doer of it. A pure conscience, like a lamp which has it's glass well clean'd, gives light to the feet. Among material things there is nothing so pure as light, which is the ground of it's being used as an emblem of the divine holiness; ^q *God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.* Sin is darkness, holiness is light; 'tis so most properly in the conscience, which diffuses it's own brightness over the conversation. He that

^p 1 Cor. viii. 4—7.

^q 1 John i. 5.

that from the word of God is instructed in the knowledge of God, and of his duty towards him, that is continually growing in this knowledge, and forms his intire conduct thereupon, who, if he has ^r *done iniquity*, resolves that he will do so no more, and prays, that *what he sees not, the Father of Lights would teach him*; who further applies to the blood of sprinkling, that he may have his ^s *conscience purged from dead works, to serve the living God*, this is the man who has a *pure conscience*, and in nothing needs to be ashamed; he acts from conscience, not from custom, from principle, not from interest; is guided by his own judgment, not by the opinions of others, and wants not a good intention to compleat the virtue of his actions.

3. THE *will* must be *pure*. The *purity* of the *will* is it's rectitude, it's being pre-vaillingly and uniformly determined for God and holiness. The *pure in heart* are habitually *pure*. Corrupt inclinations do not sway the *will* to that which is sinful and forbidden; the *law in the members may war against the law in the mind*, but is too weak to be victorious; the sanctified *will* overcomes it, and carries the christian to a steady, resolute performance of the divine commands. As the *will* is, so is the man, converted or

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uncon-

Job xxxiv. 32.

Heb. ix. 14.

unconverted, clean or unclean ; when the *will* is once fixed for religion, the change is then become saving, and the soul truly, tho' not compleatly, sanctified.

4. THE *affections* must be *pure*. As *purity* is *chastity* in the *imagination*, *light* in the *conscience*, and *rectitude* in the *will*, so 'tis *spirituality* in the *affections*. Our affections in order to be *pure*, must be heavenly ; must be set on things above, on God and Christ, objects unseen, and joys untasted ; must be kindled by the divine Spirit, and terminate on divine enjoyments. Religion purifies our affections, by translating them from earth to heaven, from sin to holiness, from vanity to solid worth, and from the creature to the Creator. The love of earthly things, like an impure and sooty flame, sullies the mind ; whereas the love of God refines the soul, as fire does metals, by purifying them from their dross. " O thou
 " sacred and divine passion, enter and fill
 " me ; let me experience thy sweet and
 " powerful operations, that my soul may
 " resemble the holy place, where God had
 " his special and glorious abode ! O thou
 " holy fire, descend and actuate this breast,
 " burn up my corruptions, brighten, en-
 " flame, and exalt my graces ! as incense
 " while it burns perfumes, so will my spices
 " in this holy fire send forth their smell,
 and

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" my soul with ease mount upward, when
" born in this flaming chariot !"

THUS have I explained *purity of heart.*
I am

II. To show the *necessity* of it to the
blessed *vision* of God ; and this I shall do in
the next Discourse.



SER-



S E R M O N V.

The absolute necessity of being
pure in heart.

MATTH. V. 8..

*Blessed are the pure in heart ; for
they shall see God.*

I N discoursing on these words I have represented the greatness of the *blessedness* included in *seeing God*, and explained the *character* to which our Saviour promises this great reward ; I am now to conclude this subject with proving the *necessity* of this disposition to our enjoying the *blessedness* promised. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they and they only, shall see God.*—they only are worthy of so great a happiness—and they only are capable of enjoying it.

I. THE *pure in heart* alone are worthy
of

of the happiness included in *seeing God*. When I say worthy I do not mean in the popish sense of *merit* (according to which the most innocent and perfect are not, and much less can sinful creatures be worthy of so divine a felicity, for then the *reward would not be of grace but of debt*) but in the gospel sense of the word, in which it signifies the same as *congruity* or *fitness*.

^a *The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden are not worthy. Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy.* And to name no more passages,

^b *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy.*

In all these places 'tis evident that by *worthy* is meant *fit* or *prepared*; the last of these is more especially to our purpose, since the persons who are said to be *worthy* are such as *never defiled their garments*, i. e. the *pure*; and for them is the reward of *walking with Christ in white*, as denoting their former innocence and present victory and triumph. If we consider the perfections of God, and the constitution of the gospel, 'tis fit and congruous that *the pure in heart* should be admitted to the *vision of God*, and that any other besides them should is not at all proper or agreeable to the divine wisdom

^a Matt. x. 11. xxii. 8. ^b Rev. iii. 4.

wisdom, which in the disposal of things and persons, does invariably observe this rule of *fitness*. The *pure in heart* alone are worthy of this privilege.

I. BECAUSE they alone fulfil their christian character and engagements. Their character as christians is that of *holy*, ^a *holy brethren, an holy priesthood*; their ^d calling is *holy*, and their obligation is to be *holy*; ^e *I beseech you therefore brethren, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. They were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they might be holy, and without blame before him in love. In baptism they were solemnly dedicated to God, and set apart for his service, that they might be holy to the Lord; being ^f buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: and this separation of themselves to holiness they renew every time they partake of the Table of the Lord. Now who but the pure in heart come up to these descriptions and obligations? They only are christians indeed, theirs alone is gospel holiness; for as to all other holiness which is not inward and seated in the heart,*

^a Heb. iii. 1. ^d 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^e 1 Tim. i. 9.

^e Rom. xii. 1. Eph. i. 4.

^f Rom. vi. 4.

'tis but seeming, not real; they therefore are the only persons who, according to the gospel covenant, can lay claim to eternal life. The scripture is expresse that ^s *no unclean person has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*; and that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; and accordingly in the last day when the church shall ^h *be presented to God, it shall appear to be a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.*

2. THE *pure in heart* alone are worthy of the *vision* of God, because they alone do resemble him; they alone are *followers of God as dear children*, and as such bear his divine image. No *purity* except that of the *heart* can render a man like God, because no other *purity* is like his. *Purity* is his nature, 'tis his very essence, he can no more cease to be holy than cease to be God; he hates sin with a perfect and eternal hatred; whereas upon inquiry you will find, that whatever *purity* men may make a shew of, if it be not in the *heart* 'tis really no part of their nature, at best 'tis but like fair colours laid upon a rotten carcass. The church is ^k *all glorious within*; this is the only glory that will bear the test of God's judgment, and the light of the last day, all other

^s Eph. v. 5. Heb. xii. 14.

^h Eph. v. 27.

^k Psa. xlv. 13.

other will then vanish and disappear. None but the *pure in heart* do forbear sin from a principle of abhorrence, none else are holy from a love to holiness. 'Tis plain therefore that besides these there are none who have a true conformity to the divine image; and if they are not like God can he delight in them? is it fit or even possible he should?

¹ *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright; but the wicked his soul hateth. He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him. The foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity. Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly and speaketh the truth in his heart.*

“ A holy God can no more delight in an
 “ unholy person than in an unholy thing;
 “ how can I expect thou shouldest delight
 “ in me, when notwithstanding the partiality of self-love, I can have no true delight and complacency in my self? Thou
 “ art the most amiable of all Beings, infinitely amiable, and this is the reason and
 “ ground of that infinite complacency and
 “ happiness which thou hast in thy blessed
 “ self; nothing is amiable but as it resembles
 “ thee; and as for those Beings who are
 “ like thee in intellectual perfections, but
 “ unlike

¹ Psal. xi. 5. 7. v. 4. 5. xv. 1, 2.

“ unlike thee in the moral, they are but
“ but the more hateful for this partial re-
“ semblance. He that does not bear thine
“ image must bear the image of the Devil;
“ and as soon mayest thou delight in the
“ evil one as in him, till his disposition is
“ chang’d. O thou ^m who *art of purer eyes*
“ *than to behold evil, and can’st not look on*
“ *iniquity*, purifie my heart by thy grace;
“ cleanse the inmost recesses of my soul,
“ and make it thy rest forever; that I may
“ be the object of thy love, of thy special
“ favour and delight, and that thou mayest
“ save me because thou delightest in me!”

3. The *pure in heart* only do truly obey the laws and commandments of God. All others are obedient in appearance only, and not in truth; for there is this great difference between the laws of God and the laws of men, that whereas the latter are intended only for the regulation of the outward actions, and of those only so far as they affect the peace and welfare of the civil community, the former claim authority over the inward man, and all the motions of the heart. It is not enough that the *action* be good, but the *principles* and *ends* of the *action* must be the same, the law taking cognizance of these as well as of the other; ’tis not enough that we refrain from

from the evil action, but we must watch also against the desire, the inclination, the thought. A heathen * *Poet* could say,

—*Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.*—

“ he who meditates any wickedness, which
“ for want of opportunity he never per-
“ forms, has all the guilt of the crime in
“ the sight of God,” who has given us a
law which takes hold of our minds and
consciences, and who always knows when
this law of his is violated. The Empire
over the mind is indeed the only empire
worthy of God, any other sort of govern-
ment may be exercised by his creatures one
over another, but the government of the
mind is his peculiar prerogative, which none
may pretend to invade without the greatest
presumption. Our Saviour in this famous
Sermon, of which the Text is a part, observes
concerning *two* of the commandments, that
there were other ways of breaking them be-
sides those which the Doctors of the law
condemn’d. The *sixth* commandment saith,
Thou shalt not kill; and provided men were
not guilty of injurious actions, it was generally
thought they were in no danger of the *judg-*
ment; whereas our blessed Lord tells them,
that ⁿ *whosoever is angry with his brother*
without

* Juv. Sat. xiii. L. 209.

ⁿ Matt. v. 22.

without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. A revengeful disposition of mind, tho' it passeth no further, is highly criminal. He interprets the *seventh* commandment, which forbids *adultery*, after the same manner; and by parity of reason we ought to extend this observation to the other commandments, and to conclude, that he who pays no regard to them in his heart, is guilty before God as truly, as he who makes no account of them in the course of his life. And so much is intimated by the *tenth* commandment, which closeth all the rest; for you will do well to take notice of this, that it makes it unlawful so much as to *covet any thing that is our neighbour's*. Coveting being an act of the soul, we may from this prohibition form a general rule for the interpretation of the divine laws, "that where the outward action is forbidden, there the inward desire and every thing that has a tendency to the act is also forbidden." And if under the *Old Testament* dispensation this rule took place, much more does it obtain under the *Gospel*, and therefore St. Paul thanks God in behalf of the *Romans*, that they ° *had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to them*. And whoever obeys not from the heart, and in the heart,

° Rom. vi. 17.

does not obey God at all. This will be more evident from the next particular.

4. None but the *pure in heart* do honour to the divine omniscience. As for all other marks of honour of which we make a shew, they are no better than empty compliments. If I am solicitous about external *purity*, why should I not be the same about that *purity* which is wholly inward? If a holy God is equally a witness to both, why am I not equally concern'd for both? I appeal to you, whether this does not seem to argue, that I have no very just thoughts of this attribute of God; that however I may believe his knowledge of the actions of men, I am yet ready to question what he so often challenges to himself, *his searching the heart*? This I say is the natural construction of a zeal for *fæderal* or *legal* or any other sort of *outward purity*, join'd with the neglect of *purity* of heart. The secret meaning is, God has not a perfect knowledge of the heart; for if he hath, and I am persuaded that he hath, why do I take so little care to keep my heart pure? I can hardly think that any but the *pure in heart* are possess'd with the belief of this prime and fundamental truth of all practical religion, *that God is omniscient*, or knoweth all things. The *pure in heart* believe this, and therefore
keep

keep their hearts with all diligence, which they consider are as naked and open to the eye of God, as those actions which they do in the broad light of day are or can be to men: such as these *worship God in spirit and in truth*, their souls bow before him, they perform a homage suitable to his infinite excellency, a homage which an omniscient God may condescend to accept; not like the religion of the hypocrite, which proceeds much upon the same supposition as the wicked lives of the profane, *that the understanding of God is not infinite*. All the difference is, that the profane act as if God shut himself up in heaven, and never knew nor cared to know what is done by the children of men here below; while the hypocrite and half reform'd christian seem to acknowledge a Providence which governs human affairs and actions, but deny God's being acquainted with the secrets of the heart. One sort limit the *presence* of God, both his *knowledge*. But let me mind such of what the *scripture* has said, and their own *reason* confirms; ^P *the Lord knoweth the thoughts of men that they are vanity*: and there cannot well be a vainer thought than this, as perhaps, there is scarce any one more common, *that God does not know our thoughts*. *He that planted the ear, shall be*

K 2

not

not bear? he that formed the eye shall not be see? he that chastiseth the heathen shall not be correct? he that teacheth man knowledge shall not be know? shall not he who made us know his own work? must not he who is infinite in all other perfections be infinite in knowledge? and if his knowledge be infinite, must it not extend to the heart? and if the heart be the object of this knowledge, can any other purity but that of the heart be worthy of God, or rewarded by him? Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.—Thus it appears that the *pure in heart* alone are worthy of the happiness implied in *seeing God* which was the first argument to prove that *they only shall see God*.

2. THE *pure in heart* alone are capable of this happiness. This may be shown with the last degree of evidence from several considerations.

1. *Impurity of heart* does at present incapacitate for clear apprehensions of God, and vital communications from him. Why hath *the fool said in his heart there is no God?* 'tis because his heart is corrupt; a corrupt heart leads to atheism, and where the effect is not altogether so bad as this, yet the corruption of the heart extremely depraves the

¶ Psal. li. 6.

¶ Psal. xiv. 1.

the notions which men frame of God, it being natural for men to think ^f *that God is such a one as themselves*; they first ^t *hold the truth in unrighteousness, and are vain in their imaginations*, and then their heart becomes foolish and darkned: this was the case of the *beathen* world, who as they grew more and more filthy were in the end given up to a *reprobate* or undiscerning mind, so that they could not distinguish between error and truth, between what was reasonable, and what absurd in religion. A polluted soul cannot be the abode of the divine Spirit; ^u *sensual, not having the spirit*; and what shall they do that have not the Spirit, when all communications of light, and grace, and comfort are by him? Partly thro' the influence of vile affections and partly thro' the want of the divine Spirit, the impure must be perfectly unqualified for conversing with God. The mind sullied by corrupt affections is like a glass, which being stain'd or dirty shuts out the light; the beams of heavenly truth cannot shine so clearly thro' a depraved understanding. The heart of a good Man is open to divine influences, it raises itself towards God, and is rais'd still higher by divine power; it seeks God, inquires after him, and gladly embraces every opportunity of acquainting itself with him:

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this

f Psal. l. 21.

t Rom. i. 18.—

u Jude 19.

this is a temper naturally fitted for spiritual acquisitions and injoyments, as the contrary temper has unavoidably the quite contrary effect. Thus it is in the present life, the unholy are in no capacity to injoy communion with God, while they are under the dominion of any lust they cannot represent God to themselves as their felicity, nor can God, on the other hand, impart felicity to them; the windows are darkned, the room all prepossess'd; God, tho' all-sufficient and able to communicate happiness to ten thousand worlds is no happiness for them; they have not right apprehensions of him, nor are they rightly affected towards him; for this cause they flie from God, shun his presence, despise his worship, are weary of his praise, cannot call *the sabbath their delight*, but if they speak truth must say, *'tis their burthen*, and in a word live without God in the world; as long as their hearts remain impure 'tis impossible they should do otherwise, the thoughts of God will give them more pain than pleasure.

2. If we consider the perfection of this happiness which is reserv'd for another life, 'tis certain that *impurity of heart* does yet more incapacitate for it; since as all injoyment supposes likeness between the faculty and the object, so that which is perfect does more especially require it. Without
some

some degree of proportion, or similitude there can be no injoyment at all. There is no affinity or proportion between sounds and the organ of seeing, or colours and the organ of hearing; and accordingly 'tis an absurdity at which even children will laugh to talk of *bearing* colours or *seeing* sounds. Every sense has its peculiar object, and so every faculty, nor can one sense or faculty intrench upon the objects of another; the reason is, that there must be a conformation and agreeableness, wherever there is perception, and injoyment; and as every sense and faculty has its distinct object, so in order to have a thorough perception of this object, the sense or faculty must be intirely clear'd from all obstructions; for as far forth as the faculty is imperfect, or deprav'd, the fruition will be the same. This demonstrates the utter impossibility of God's being injoyed by an unholy soul; without holiness he cannot be injoy'd at all, much less to perfection; for God is a *holy* Being, he is every where in scripture describ'd under this character; this is his glory and the foundation of those praises which are continually resounding from the angelical hosts, who cry one to another, *"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of glory! how much more heaven, which is stil'd his holy place, and*

K 4

the

the *habitation of his holiness*? here are the undefiled mansions of bliss, here ^{*} *nothing that defileth can enter*, nothing that is impure can subsist; as 'tis said of some countries, whether from the nature of the soil, or of the climate, no venomous creatures will live in them. The angels of heaven are frequently call'd *holy*, this is more for their honour than their other title of *mighty* angels; in the latter they are rival'd by the *fallen* angels, but not in the former. The employments and the delights of heaven are *holy*; there are no sordid pursuits or joys like those of the miser; no mad and foolish diversions like those of the vain; no filthy delights like those of the voluptuary; no diabolical pleasures like those of the ambitious, the revengeful, the cruel; to do the will of God is at once the employment and happiness of the blessed. Let us then suppose a person whose heart is a sink of *impure* lusts translated to those heavenly regions; what can he do there? how find his happiness where he cannot find any one thing that suits his inclinations and desires? neither the *object* of felicity, nor the *company*, nor the *place*, nor the *work*, nor any of the circumstantial delights? He will blush, he will loath, he will be tired and uneasy, but he can never be pleas'd; he will not know how

^{*} Rev. xxi. 27.

how to pass his time, will be ready to wish himself any where, but in *hell*, where alone the torment could be greater, than that which he feels in the presence of a *holy* God, and surrounded with a light, which shows him to himself in all his nakedness and deformity. And that which makes the case still worse is,

3. THAT there is not only an *unlikeness*, but an *aversion* of the impure in heart to the *holy* God, which places them at an infinite distance from one another in point of happiness. Hatred to God lies at the bottom of every impure heart; they may not be aware of this, they may think they love God, as 'tis possible they may, considered as the *author* and *support* of their Beings, but, if he be considered as a *holy* and *just* God, they hate him; their natures are not only unlike, but repugnant; they are not only *strangers*, but *enemies to God by wicked works*; the enmity is rooted in the heart, and can never be cleared, but by that which changes their nature, and makes them new creatures. While this enmity continues, can there be any intercourse, any happiness? can enemies delight in each other? is not this the peculiar privilege of friendship? ² *What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? what communion has light with dark-*

¹ Coloss. i. 21.

² 2 Cor. vi. 14.

darkness? and what concord has Christ with Belial? The most perfect contraries may be reconciled, righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, *Christ* and *Belial*, as soon as the impure may take up their rest in God. The language which a * *Poet* of our own represents the fallen spirits as using, is really that of all unsanctified persons.

— *with what eyes could we
Stand in his presence bumble, and receive
Strict laws impos'd, to celebrate his throne
With warbled hymns, and to his Godhead sing
Forc'd Hallelujabs?—This must be our task
In heaven, this our delight; how wearisome
Eternity so spent in worship paid
To whom we hate!—*

Believe it, *Sirs*, unless we are first reconciled to God, which we shall never be till we are *pure in heart*, *heaven* itself would be but a larger prison, *paradise* a lonely wilderness, God, the most lovely of all objects, the most hateful; the darkness, the banishment, the company, and the curses of the damned, and all but their pains and horrors, preferable to the light and freedom of those upper skies, the vision of God, the society of the saints, and their most ravishing

* *Milton's Paradise Lost*, B. II. L. 239, &c.

ing songs; you would hate all these, instead of loving them, and what you hated would be a burthen, not a pleasure. Think of this, and labour after a change in the disposition of your hearts before it be too late. Let not death find you in a state of enmity against God, for the same that death finds you, you will remain after it; he that is *unboly* then, will be *unboly still*, and consequently unhappy.

4. *Impurity of heart* implies such a habit and temper of soul, as is absolutely incompatible with true happiness. Omnipotence itself cannot make a reasonable Being happy, without first making it *boly*, because no *unboly* Being is in its natural state; its constitution is vitiated, its appetites are irregular, its passions disordered, and all its faculties out of frame. And is any thing more than this necessary to render a Being miserable? Were it possible for God to be reconciled to such a Being, yet that Being could never be reconciled to itself, never be pleased with itself? Were it supposeable that God should admit such a Being into his blissful presence, and allow it all the freedom of access which the most sinless creatures enjoy; were it supposeable that he should not manifest his displeasure to him in any way whatsoever, yet it could not be

be happy in this fruition of God, were it for no other reason, than that it could not be satisfied with its own disposition. The sight of God would but aggravate the resentment it feels, in the consciousness of its own odiousness and depravity; the soul would never appear so odious in its own view, as when placed in the presence of him, whose nature is all order and harmony, all purity and perfection. Happiness arises not barely from the *circumstances* of an intelligent creature, but from the *regularity* of its inclinations, and the *conformity* of the whole to *right reason*. Nothing may be wanting in the circumstances that is fit to be desired, notwithstanding which, the misery of that creature may be inexpressible; we find it so in this world, where multitudes are unhappy from this only cause, that the ill posture of their spirits, their inordinate and misplaced affections, will not suffer them to be quiet; and I will be bold to affirm, it would be no otherwise in heaven, were impure and irregular desires as common there, as they are here.

5. An *impure heart* is ever attended with a guilty conscience. They always go together, and who needs be told the disquietude which is inseparable from guilt? Our first parents had no greater felicity in innocence, than to converse with their maker, but no
sooner

sooner have they lost their innocence, than they dread that voice, which was formerly the sweetest music to their ears, and ^b *bide themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.* A guilty mind would produce the same effect in the celestial Paradise; the *vision* of God would overflow the impure with confusion, a confusion resembling that which an ungrateful person, a perfidious friend, a rebellious subject has in the presence of his benefactor, his friend, his sovereign; but proportionably greater, as God is a more liberal benefactor, a kinder friend, a more gracious, as well as a more awful sovereign, than any other can be. O how could the sinful soul look to God, reflecting upon its numberless unrepented sins, and conscious to its present averſation from him! The wicked would ^c *call to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and bide them from the presence of him that sitteth upon the throne,* even tho' they saw no wrath or terror in that face, because it would call their sins to remembrance, and fill them with unsupportable shame. These several considerations appear sufficient to convince any one, that the *pure in heart* alone are capable of the happiness implied in the *vision* of God; nor am I able to conceive what refuge or hopes can be

^b Genes. iii. 8.

^c Rev. vi. 16.

be left for unholy sinners, unless they please themselves with an imagination, that God, at their departure out of the world, will sanctify their souls all at once, and so prepare them for the blessedness of the heavenly state. Of the *possibility* of this no one can doubt ; but the question is, whether there be the least foundation in *reason* or *scripture* to expect it? 'tis plain there is not ; 'tis plain on the contrary, that such a proceeding would contradict the established order and constitution of things, according to which the present state is designed, as a state of trial and preparation for the happiness of a future and eternal world : for what would this trial and preparation signify, what one wise end would it answer, if at last God made no difference between those who had approved themselves in the trial, and been careful to prepare for a world to come, and those who had not ; if they were to be both *alike* happy after death, both *alike* dealt with in judgment ? Such an indiscriminating disposal of the future rewards cannot be supposed, without the highest reflection upon the wisdom, the holiness, and the veracity of God ; 'tis supposing him to act inconsistently, to threaten, and not to execute, to send us into this world for no end, and to give us a law for no purpose ; since it is to no purpose he has
done

done all this, if after all it be one and the same thing, whether we are obedient or disobedient, pure or defiled, qualified or not qualified. Thus it would be, if death were a purgation to *all*, from the guilt and pollution they have contracted in their lives, and without any previous care of our own, God wrought a change upon the soul at the moment of its separation from the body, or but a few moments before, which shall fit us for that happiness and glory, which thro' the whole course of our lives we neglected and despised.

I shall now close the subject with a short *Application*.

I. WHAT has been said may supply us with a rule whereby to try our hopes of heaven. 'Tis our hope that we shall *see God*, that we shall be received into glory, that we shall be happy in body and soul to eternity; this we say is our hope, but this our hope is presumption, if it be not built upon an inquiry into our hearts, and the evidence of their *purity*. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*; we expect this blessedness, but do we attend to the condition of it? 'Tis a vain thing to depend upon the *reward*, without the *condition*, or upon the *happiness* promised, without the *qualification* to which the promise is made.

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It is not God's way to trifle with his creatures; if he requires of us such and such conditions, he will never dispense his blessings without the performance of these conditions. Let me therefore examine whether I am possess'd of this evangelical *purity*; whether I have not hitherto deceived myself with a shadow of it; let me examine whether I am sincere, upright, and holy; whether my aims and intentions are right; whether my heart is cleansed from all defiling lusts; whether I avoid sin from an inward detestation of it, and practise holiness from a persuasion of its intrinsic loveliness, and the delight I take in it. All this is implied in *purity of heart*, and therefore, as to all this, I should be fully persuaded in my own mind, before I aspire to the *full assurance of hope*. Let me further examine, what *effect* my hopes have upon me; as they suppose me to be sincerely good, so are they effectual to make me better? ^d *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as God is pure. What hope? that when God appears, he shall be like him, and see him as he is.* All such hopes, as both find and leave men under the power of their lusts, are delusions; and whatever imaginary satisfaction they may yield us now, will afford us none at all in the end; for

^d 1 John iii. 2, 3.

for *what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul?*

2. SINCE the *pure in heart alone shall see God*, let us be exhorted to follow after this *purity*. Here I will leave with you some *Directions*, which I shall be able but just to mention.

1. BEGIN with *purity of life*; for tho' this be not the same as *purity of heart*, it is yet a considerable step towards it. He that is watchful over his external behaviour, will by degrees be taught to extend the same vigilance to the acts and motions of his mind; he who resolutely abstains from the *act* of sin, will in time find it less difficult to banish the *thought* of it from his imagination; he who denies himself sinful gratifications, will at last be likely to proceed to the *crucifying the desires of the flesh, and of the mind*: the continual restraint and sobriety of the life, will gradually weaken the evil inclinations of the heart, which will be less violent, when not permitted to pass into act; besides, that a person will hardly think it worth his while, for the pleasure of a sinful imagination, to run the dreadful hazard of perishing forever, when he is at the pains of laying a bridle upon his appetites, so as that they shall never hurry

• Job xxvii. 8.

him into irregularities in his outward behaviour. But then observe, this care over the life and conversation must be constant, to answer any valuable end ; since he, who for the most part kept himself from the pollutions of the world, but every now and then lets himself be carried down the stream, will but find himself where he was at first, and by his occasional indulgencies, lose all the benefit he might have proposed to himself by his self-denials.

2. GIVE yourselves to the instrumental duties and means of purification ; [†] *pray without ceasing*. Prayer has a wonderful influence upon the temper of the mind, it enlarges the heart, and cures it of that narrowness and selfishness, which is but too natural to it ; it exalts the heart to God, and things above, by conversing with which in prayer, we shall learn to have our conversation in heaven at other times ; it also purifies the heart, introducing a holy disposition of soul, both as the natural effect, and the gracious reward of frequent devotion. As [‡] *every creature of God is sanctified to us by prayer*, so we by prayer are sanctified to God. *Reading and hearing* God's word, is another of the purifying duties which our religion prescribes us. It is the quality

[†] 1 Thess. v. 17.

[‡] 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

quality of God's word to sanctify; ^h *sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth*: and hereby is it distinguished from the words of men, which, as the wind does the waters, may trouble the passions of the soul, but cannot purify them; the sanctifying virtue of the *word* demonstrates its truth. The same effect has the *Lord's-Supper* devoutly received, tending more than any duty whatsoever, to increase our detestation of sin, and our love of holiness; for, by our abhorrence of sin, we declare our indignation against the murderers of our blessed Lord; and in our love of holiness, we express our love to Christ, who died, as well as lived, to promote holiness among mankind, and ⁱ *to purify us to himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

3. LABOUR after purifying graces. I shall just mention *two* or *three* of this kind. An evangelical faith; ^k *purifying your hearts by faith*. This was the great instrument of sanctifying the *heathen* world, that they might be fit for an offering to God. Faith in Jesus Christ including a firm persuasion of the several doctrines of the gospel, particularly of that *life and immortality* which is *brought to light* therein, has a mighty efficacy to raise the soul above this lower world, and prepare it for the joys of a

L 2 better

^h John xvii. 17. ⁱ 1 Tit. ii. 14. ^k Acts xv. 19.

better. Of this *evangelical faith* the genuine offspring is a *godly fear*, which conspires with it in producing a saving change upon the heart. ¹ *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* He who walks under an awful sense of the greatness, the holiness, the omnipresence, and the other attributes of God, will feel a constant check upon his corrupt inclinations, and be prompted to endeavour after the greatest degrees of holiness, that he may be approved of this God. The christian does further experience a purifying virtue in his *hope*, as I observed before.

4. **IMPLORE** and cherish the sanctifying Spirit. ^m *We are chosen to salvation thro' sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth.* The divine Spirit fits up an abode for himself, and then enters and dwells there. Let us therefore earnestly beg of God that he would ⁿ *not take his holy Spirit from us*, but communicate him to us in greater measures, that we may be *full of the holy Ghost*; and to this end let us attend to every pious motion, obsequiously resign ourselves to his guidance, and with the utmost caution guard against every thing that may be offensive to this sacred guest.

¹ 2 Cor. vii. i. ^m 2 Thess. ii. 13. ⁿ Psal. li. 11.

5. **LET**

5. LET us frequently contemplate *those patterns of purity* which our religion sets before us, the holy God and the holy Jesus. They who would excel in painting or architecture, acquaint themselves with the best artists, and performances in each kind. The impression which the thoughts of God and of his Son *manifest in the flesh* would have upon us, could not but be considerable; we should be fired to an imitation of such glorious *originals*, and as we stedfastly beheld them, should be *changed into the same image from glory to glory.*

To conclude.—Think of the many advantages which attend *purity of heart*, such as a greater self-enjoyment, a settled calm and peace of mind, divine communications, and the reviving assurance of future glory. None have so true an enjoyment of *themselves* as the *pure in heart*. The keeping the body clean and wholesome contributes both to health and pleasure; there is a sensible refreshment after bodily ablutions, and a man finds his limbs more pliant, and his spirits more brisk; how much more must this hold with respect to the mind, the *purity* of which gives a vigour to its faculties, and puts them into a capacity of exerting themselves in the most agreeable manner. And then *purity* is almost ever rewarded with peace, and peace inexpressibly

159 *The absolute necessity of, &c.* VOL. II.
bly sweet and reviving. The *pure heart*
is the most untroubled, like liquors refin'd
and drawn off from their sediment, while
those which are not well purified, but are
still upon their lees, are liable to perpetual
fermentations from the least change of wea-
ther. Thus do the changes of Providence
affect the un sanctified soul and make it
unquiet. Add to this, that *purity of heart*
invites the divine presence, and prepares for
divine enjoyments. And finally, it gives
the soul bright and ample prospects of a
happiness beyond the grave, of *the inheri-*
tance in light, and of *a crown of glory that*
fadeth not away. The *pure in heart shall see*
God; and if I am one of that number, what
can exceed or equal my joy? what vanquish
my resolutions? what can extinguish my
zeal? When *I rejoice in hope, I can be pa-*
tient in tribulation too, and triumph over my
last enemy, who will not so properly de-
stroy my body, as lay it to rest till the re-
surrection, and immediately transmit my soul
into the presence of God.

Col. i. 12.

Rom. xii. 12.

SER-



S E R M O N VI.

The character of the peacemakers
described.

MATTH. V. 9.

*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they
shall be called the children of God.*

I N these words our divine master calls us to consider another part of the *character* and *temper* of his genuine disciples, together with the *blessedness* annexed to this *character* I shall treat of these *two* distinctly.

I. W E are here invited by our divine master to consider another *mark* or *characteristick* of his genuine disciples; the name he gives them is that of *peacemakers*, and if they are his disciples indeed, they do, in a greater or a less degree deserve it.—I would premise

two things before I proceed to explain this character.

1. IT is suppos'd that those *peacemakers* whom our Saviour here pronounces *blessed* upon the account of their good affection towards men, have made their peace with God; therefore *peace* and *holiness* are ranked together; ^a *follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.* Purity of heart is that beatitude, which immediately precedes that of *peaceableness*.

IT would be to very little purpose, if the thing was practicable, for a man to live peaceably with his fellow creatures, and to be very forward to promote the peace of the world, while he was at war with his maker; the peace it self, which those persons cultivated, would be all the reward they were to look for; being in a state of hostility with God, they must expect nothing from him but that *fearful indignation*, which will consume all *his adversaries*; and indeed their folly and ingratitude would in some respects be greater than that of other sinners, that while they had so much wisdom and goodness, as to agree with men like themselves, from whom they had comparatively received little, and had little to hope or fear, their minds should be ill affected to that

^a Heb. xii. 14

that Being to whom they are infinitely indebted, and who can do for or against them infinitely more than all other Beings can do. The *peacemakers* in the Text are not thus inconsistent; they do not study *peace* where it is less necessary, and neglect it where it is of the highest importance to them; their first care is to see their peace well secured with heaven, and then they set themselves to make peace upon earth; knowing that till then their condition is infinitely hazardous, and that they can have no solid, lasting peace and satisfaction in themselves; but their peace being made with God thro' Christ, as the mediator of it, they can now with the greater pleasure think, not only how to bring others into the same blessed alliance, but in what methods to promote that peace which is of a temporal kind; for all their endeavours and attempts to advance which, and increase this good temper, they well know they shall not fail of their reward.

2. THE other thing to be premis'd is, that allowance is always to be made for the difference of natural tempers. The tempers of some men may not naturally be the happiest; were they to follow their own inclination, before it was corrected by the *grace* of God, and their own constant care and vigilance, instead of making peace, they

they might be frequently tempted to break it; but as far as any inclination is *strictly natural*, they are not to answer for it; and if notwithstanding this perverseness of their natural disposition, they learn with time and pains, a peaceable temper and behaviour, their virtue is much greater, the greater the opposition they have overcome, in order to practise it; it is enough they are now the *children of peace*, whatever they *naturally* were; and acting from a sense of duty, they cannot doubt even of God's being well pleased with them now, and rewarding them hereafter.

THESE two things premis'd, I come now to draw the *character* of the persons here stiled *peacemakers*. It is observed, and very justly, by more Commentators than one, that *peacemakers* are the same, as *men of a peaceable mind and disposition*; for as he that is *inclined to lying*, is said ^b to *make a lie* because he delights in making it; and he that is *habitually inclin'd to sin*, ^{πονηρὰ ἐργάζων} *to do sin or make it* (for the original word is the same) because he delights in the practice of wickedness; in like manner, he that is *prevailingly disposed to follow peace*, may be stiled a *peacemaker**; the word denotes the habit of the mind, which is the same, equally amiable in its self, and in the

^b Rev. xxii. 15. * *Vid.* Whitby, and Hammond.

fight of God, whether the *peaceable* man has an opportunity to make peace among others or no.

I SHALL represent this *character* in some particulars, but very briefly.

I. THE *peacemaker* heartily loves peace, and has a very high value for it, as vastly preferable to a state of confusion and disorder; Peace is what he desires, and delights in the thought of; 'tis a lovely thing in his eye, of greater price than to be lightly parted with, or bartered away for trifles; he can say as the *Psalmist*, that *he is for peace*, even tho' he dwell among them that hate it and declare *for war*; yea, this only serves to raise the value of it, and make him long, and pray for the return of this fair stranger; he regards peace, as more eligible in its self, than contention; it better suits his inclination; peace gives a relish to other temporal enjoyments, which lose their worth in his account when they are mingled with the bitterness of strife; he loves peace, not only for the present pleasure it affords him, but likewise for the happy fruits that spring from it; for while, *where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work*, all the fruits of righteousness grow and flourish in a serene and peaceful season:

^c Psal. cxx. 6, 7.

^d James. iii. 16, 18.

season : * *righteousness and peace have kissed each other* ; these two are naturally allied, and mutually harmonize with each other, while each flies the place, where the other does not reign : † *that we may lead peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and honesty* ; men are most likely to lead a godly, when they lead a *peaceable and quiet* life ; the lover of peace has the greater affection for it, because when all is at peace about him, he can apply himself undisturbed to the improvement of his own graces, and to do good to mankind. There is another reason for the great esteem and affection which the *peacemaker* has for peace, and that is, its being more acceptable to the *God of peace*, who would have peace prevail in every part of his kingdom ; his love to God makes him love peace, by the love of which he knows he shall recommend himself to the favour and approbation of this best of all Beings.

2. THE *peacemaker* has a just, and lively sense upon his mind of the obligation he is under to seek peace. He is far from thinking this an indifferent matter in point of duty, or devolving the duty upon others, as if they were obliged to study all the means of peace, and to sacrifice every thing to it, but he himself nothing ; he verily believes 'tis what he is indispensibly obliged to, what

* Psal. lxxxv. 10.

† 1 Tim. ii. 9.

what nothing can excuse him from attending to, and what he cannot wilfully neglect, without openly violating the dictates of reason and religion, since both these concur to strengthen the obligation. As an *intelligent* creature he is capable of estimating the proper value of this blessing of peace, and therefore cannot but stand condemned by his own mind and conscience, if he does not endeavour after it; as a *social* Being, a creature made for society, and living in it, reason convinces him that it must be his duty to cherish in himself every social disposition, every such disposition as tends to make him a valuable member of society, particularly a *peaceable* temper, without some degree of which, society can hardly subsist; when that temper universally prevails it cannot but flourish: as a *professor of religion*, the *peacemaker* knows himself to be under peculiar engagements to promote the interest of peace and charity, that he may herein comply with the frequent commands of the gospel, may better answer the design of it, and consult its credit and honour in the world; of these things the *christian peacemaker* has a strong sense, and conviction upon his soul, he feels his obligations to peace, so as that he could not be easy and at peace in himself, if he did not regard them in his practice. It follows

3. THAT

3. THAT the *peacemaker* having such an esteem and love for peace, and such a lively sense of his obligation to seek it, is accordingly stedfastly resolved, and constantly disposed, ^s *if it be possible, and as far as in him lies, to live peaceably with all men, and to preserve, and make peace among them.* This particular contains *three* others under it.

1. THE man of a *peaceable* disposition, endeavours to live peaceably himself with all men.

2. HE makes it his business to preserve, and cultivate, and restore peace among all men, not thinking it enough that he has no variance with them himself.

3. HE is so intent upon this; as to do all that in him lies for the accomplishment of it.

1. THE man of a *peaceable* disposition, endeavours to live peaceably himself with all men. He would not, willingly, have a quarrel with any man, and that he may not, he studiously *follows peace with all men*; his behaviour is inoffensive, adapted to please all, and to give no just occasion of disgust, or accusation to any, not even to those who seek occasion against him; he as carefully abstains

abstains from all words and actions, not only that are *really* injurious, but that have the *appearance* of being so; considers the notions, and weighs the tempers of men, that he may say and do nothing to provoke them; ^h *he follows after those things that make for peace*, and wherewith one may recommend himself to the affections of another; does not merely avoid every thing that is unkind and uncharitable, but practise the reverse, by an obliging and respectful carriage, and a readiness to do all friendly offices, conciliating the minds of others, and disarming, even those, who had an inclination to fall out with him; he is watchful against any misunderstanding that may arise between him and his neighbour; and if any such has happened, takes care that it shall not continue, at least, it shall be no fault of his, if it does; his method therefore is, if *his brother hath ought against him*, or he against his brother, to talk the matter over with him in a friendly manner, manifesting a desire to be set right, if he has been mistaken, or to make satisfaction, if he has done any thing, though unwillingly, to the prejudice of another; or to receive satisfaction, and enter into a reconciliation, where he himself is the person offended.— These are some of the ways of peace, which he

^h Rom. xiv. 19.

he makes trial of, in order to live upon good terms with all mankind.

2. NOT content with endeavouring to be at peace himself with others, he is very desirous to preserve, and make peace among them. He is one of those that answer the same end in society, that a strong cement does in a building, to keep the parts of it together; it is a character he is very ambitious of, to be a *healer of breaches*; to imitate *Moses*, who, when two ¹ *Israelites* strove together would have set them at one again, saying, *Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?* and though he does not love to thrust himself into an office undesired, yet, where he has a fair opportunity, and there is a prospect of success, he is ready to interpose, and glad if he may prove a reconciler; to this end he persuades men to decide matters amicably, endeavours to possess them with a good opinion of, and kind affections towards each other; instead of blowing the coals, which is the way of too many, he seeks to quench them, by concealing or removing out of the way, whatever tends to exasperate the spirits of men one against another. No one can be ignorant, what a tendency, a custom too much prevailing in the world, has to beget and maintain strife, I mean that of carrying to
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¹ *Exod. ii. 13. Acts vii. 26.*

and fro, all the ill-natured and offensive things that are said by one man of another, even inconsiderate, or in a passion; and therefore, no one who has the least zeal for the preservation of peace, will be guilty of this practice; having such frequent instances before him, of the unhappy effects of this practice, he will be sure to avoid it. Is a person at the head of a family? if he be one that loves peace, he will discountenance the tale-bearer (of whom Solomon, long since, made this observation, *that he separateth chief friends*) and next to them that fear God in his family, will show the greatest favour to those that are of a peaceable and quiet spirit; they that act otherwise, only trouble their own houses. And, as for the *members* of families, those of them, who have any title to the *blessedness* in the Text, will make it their aim to promote the peace of the families in which Providence has cast their lot, not only, because in the peace of these, they may hope to have peace, but from the aversion they have to all discord and contention. In reference to the *publick* peace, the person I am describing, is never found among the disturbers of it; on the contrary, *he studies to be quiet, and to do his own business*, obedient to his civil governours for *conscience sake*, not apt to

* Prov. xvi. 28.

1 1 Thes. iv. 11. Rom. xiii. 5.

Speak evil of dignities, nor forward to censure what he does not understand; and should affairs not be managed altogether, as he thinks they ought to be, yet not hasty to entertain a dissatisfaction to the government, much less to spread and propagate it, reckoning it much more for his honour to be a dutiful subject, and an example of peaceableness and benevolence in the common-wealth, than a *deep politician*, and one able to do a great deal of mischief. Of the peace of the *christian church*, he is in a more especial manner tender, being one of those that are peaceable in *Israel*, ^m *that pray for the peace of Jerusalem*, and contribute their part, according to the station they are in, to make it flourish; ⁿ *who forbear one another in love, and endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*; he is not for widening of differences, nor representing the differences in opinion, or in other things, greater than really they are, would bring christians as near together as he can, and persuade them to be of *one heart*, at least, if they cannot be of *one mind*, which, in this state of doubt, and imperfection, is hardly to be expected: if his judgment were to be followed, all things would continue in the *christian church*, as the head of it has left them, *indifferent things*

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^m Psal. cxxii. 6.ⁿ Eph. iv. 2, 3.

in a state of indifference; things disputable, or of less importance, to be freely debated, and never imposed; he always acts upon this principle, that liberty and charity, in religious disputes, do at once, most effectually secure the peace of the church, and tend to the advancement of the power and practice of true godliness. Of whatever particular society of christians he is a member, he esteems it his duty, to be a pattern himself of peaceableness, as well as other christian virtues and good works, and to be watchful for the peace of the community; doing his utmost to procure unanimity in such things as relate to their common interest, to keep those of a more busy and restless spirit, in good temper, to prevent jealousies and suspicions among fellow-members, or to suppress them, if they are already risen; to preserve, as I may say, an equal ballance, that one part of a congregation may not lord it over another, the many over a few, or a few leading men over the many, and to keep things from being carried with a high hand, or to an extremity; he is always a friend to the softest, gentlest methods, and if he could, would not have a single person unnecessarily grieved and offended.

3. He is so intent upon living peaceably, and making peace, that he does all that in him lies, for the accomplishment of this

end. 'Tis possible that after all, his endeavours may be unsuccessful, or may not have all the success he desires; but then he is solicitous to act so that his conscience may have no room to charge him with being wanting on his part; 'tis not a *private humour*, or a *particular inclination*, or a *point of honour*, or some little *by-interest* of his own, that shall hinder; rather than the matter shall stick here, he will deny himself, make his own judgment in *indifferent* things, submit to that of others for peace sake; will lock up his distinguishing notions in his own breast, when he should do more hurt than good, by publishing them; and in a word, be content to suffer lesser inconveniences, to prevent greater: a man may find some difficulty to consent to purchase peace upon such terms; but where would be the virtue of peaceableness, if it was to be practised without any difficulty and opposition at all? If we are at most expence in bringing about peace, as we have a greater share in so good a work, so it must yield us the grater satisfaction.—But then, after all, there are some things which must not be sacrificed for peace sake; we may go to a certain length, but not further; *e. g.* we must not sacrifice the temporal rights of others, much less the rights of conscience, or of the christian church; we are not obliged to
give

give up our own rights of a civil and worldly kind, when they are considerable, for no reason, but because another man would dispossess us of them, and will not let us be at peace if we will not part with them: such cases may occur, when a person may very allowably, and without violating the rules of the gospel, vindicate his rights, though no other person be concerned in them, against the unjust invader, either by law or otherwise, as prudence and charity shall direct; nor, in this case, can he be accounted *litigious* or *unpeaceable*, doing nothing out of strife, or to satisfy a revengeful temper, but purely to assert his own rights, and to give a check to injustice; but should a man, out of the great love he has for peace, give up his right, when it is intirely his own, yet he may not do it when others have a share in it, without their consent: no one, to buy the friendship of another, may part with what is not his to give, belonging to his family, or his relations, or some other persons, much less may the rights of conscience be delivered up. Are the terms of peace such, that I cannot in conscience, comply with them? can I not oblige men, unless I disoblige God? be received into the communion of any denomination of christians, except I will do something, of the lawfulness of which, as to myself at least,

I am not satisfied after the most impartial examination? In this case, if peace be violated, they are to answer for it, who put such *stumbling-blocks* in other mens way, not they who cannot get over them; such persons may give what hard names they please, to those who will not, or rather cannot, submit to their *unscriptural* impositions, but no wise man will much regard them, nor be afraid of their *anathemas*, which, unless backed with the *secular* power, are likely to hurt none but themselves. It had been well, if those in power, had always observed the same moderation as the Synod at *Jerusalem* did, who thought fit to lay no greater burthen upon the *gentile* converts, than a *few things*; which the circumstances of that time made *necessary*: so sparing were they of their injunctions, though under the assistance of an *infallible* Spirit, to which no assemblies of men now can pretend, and for that reason, should content themselves with *explaining the commandments of Christ*, and *enforcing them by reason and argument*, without *adding any thing of their own*, to make his yoke less easy, and his burthen less light, than he himself has made it. The *christian* church has its *rights*, which ought not to be betrayed, by owning a usurpation of that power, which belongs solely to the supreme

supreme head, and law-giver of the church. It is no breach of the peace of the church, or not a criminal one, for christians to assert its privileges, and *to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free.* Were there nothing else to be pleaded for *Non-conformity*, but men's having set a hedge of their own making, about the ordinances of the gospel, and permitting none to minister in the church, but those, who first qualify themselves by taking *certain oaths*, and making *certain subscriptions*, no other qualification being deemed sufficient, this alone would justify it; especially when the *civil magistrate* has left men at liberty to judge for themselves: and, whereas, they are perpetually insisting upon the *peace of the church*, as a most sacred thing, it is obvious to ask, wherein this peace consists? is it in holding the *same opinions*, and exactly observing the *same modes* of divine worship? who does not see, that in the reason and nature of the thing, this is no way necessary to the peace of the church; since, notwithstanding any such diversity as this, would men only exercise a little more *mutual charity*, they might live very peaceably together, and help to edify one another in love? — Whatever others do, let us labour to discharge our duty, love them that *love the*

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Lord Jesus in sincerity, carry it friendly to those from whom we differ; and by a humble, charitable, quiet behaviour, show that it is not out of a spirit of contradiction, or from a factious temper, that we take the liberty that is given us, *of worshipping God in our own way*, but from a persuasion that herein we do our duty, without censuring others, who are otherwise minded, as if they may not be as sincere in their way as we are in ours, and consequently, as acceptable in the sight of God. The right of private judgment, is the *grand principle* upon which the *Reformation* is founded; we cannot therefore be to blame, if we judge for ourselves, provided, we inform our judgments in the best manner we can, nor for acting according to our judgment; this we ought to do, at the same time showing our regard for peace, by doing every thing to promote it that we honestly can. In a word, the surest and easiest, as well as most general rule of judging concerning ourselves, whether we are not wanting in our part, to the peace of the world about us, is, to be sure that we are really *lovers of peace*; for if we are, especially if we love it so well as to be zealously affected towards it, and never better pleased, than when we are instrumental in procuring it, we shall not plead *conscience*, for not making greater concessions for peace.

peace sake, when 'tis nothing but a stubbornness of temper, or an obstinate attachment to our particular fancies and opinions. If we love peace in sincerity, we shall do all that can reasonably be expected from us; and if we do no more, the reason will be, that upon a deliberate view of the case, we are persuaded in ourselves that we ought not. Let me add, before I leave this head, that the *character* I have been explaining admits of *degrees*; a man may be a *peacemaker*, so far as is necessary to his being a true christian, who does not excel in this part of the christian temper, or is excelled by others in it; yea, he may not have made that improvement in this virtue, which he himself has done in some others, having been hindered from it by the greater opposition he has met with in the exercise of this virtue, either from within or from without, or been more advantageously placed and circumstanced, for the advancement of himself, in some other virtues than in this; however, he is, upon the whole, an *unfeigned lover of peace*, pursues it in earnest, and whatever defects he labours under, is not chargeable with any, that would destroy the very being of this virtue.

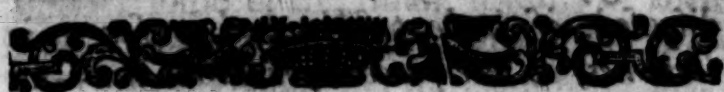
THE next thing in order is

II. The consideration of the *blessedness* to which this *character* is entitled; *Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*

1. THEY are the *children of God.*
2. THIS title will be acknowledged due to them by the world. And
3. God will own and treat them as his *children.* — But the prosecution of these particulars must be reserved for another Discourse.



SER-



S E R M O N VII.

The blessedness of the peacemakers.

MATTH. V. 9.

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

IN a preceeding Discourse I explained the character to which our Saviour in the Text promises a *blessedness*. I observed that 'tis presupposed, that these persons have *made their peace with God*—and that in considering this character, allowance is always to be made for the difference of natural tempers: these things premised, I gave their character in the following particulars—they heartily love peace and have a very high value for it, as vastly preferable to a state of confusion and discord—they have a just and lively sense upon their minds of their obligations to seek peace—and they are accordingly

cordingly stedfastly resolved and constantly disposed, *if it be possible, and as far as in them lies, to live peaceably with all men*—for this purpose they live peaceably themselves—and endeavour to preserve or restore peace among others; as heads, or members of families, and as members of religious or civil societies—and they do all that in them lies to accomplish this end without sacrificing the rights of truth, of conscience, of the christian church, the temporal rights of others, or their own more important civil interests.—I am now,

II. To represent the *blessedness* to which this *character* is entitled; this I shall do under the following heads.

I. *Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the children of God.* To be called, is in the language of scripture frequently the very same as *to be*; so we may be allowed to understand the expression in this place, persons of this pacifick disposition of soul, have a remarkable likeness to God, which is the thing meant by their being *his children*. As men ^a are *his servants whom they obey* (whether of sin or of righteousness) so *his children whom they resemble*. Wicked men are of ^b *their father the devil*, and the reason is there given, that *they do the will of their father*;

^a Rom. vi. 16.

^b John viii. 44.

father; some of the ruling features of their minds, are among those by which that hateful Spirit is known and distinguished: good men, on the contrary, are the *children of God*, because they are ^c *followers*, or imitators of *God as dear children*; and particularly in this part of the divine image, which is stiled *goodness*, from which peaceableness springs as one of its natural fruits: this is one of his titles under the gospel dispensation, *the God of peace*; and when the Apostle *Paul* would enforce his exhortations to peaceableness, he does it from this very title,

Finally brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

'Tis an ingenious observation of a good * Writer " that under the *jewish* state (which " as in other things, so in this, was very peculiar, that it was a state of theocracy or " divine government) God was known by " the name of the *Lord of hosts*, not as expressing his true natural likeness and approbation, but only his relation to that " particular people whose king and leader " he was; but now under the state of the " *gospel*, which exhibits a more genuine " idea of God, he has changed his title, " from the stile of *war*, to the stile of " *peace*." To us christians he has not discovered

^c Eph. v 1. ^d 2 Cor. xiii, 11. * Norris.

covered himself as the *Lord of hosts*, but as *the Lord of peace*. That he loves peace he has shown, by calling us to peace by the preaching of the gospel, which is admirably adapted to promote every virtue it commands, and this of peaceableness in particular, and by being the *author, not of confusion but of peace*. Out of that state of war and confusion, in which the elements were blended together in the the primitive chaos, he by his power, under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, reduced things into the most wonderful harmony and order; and to his Providence maintaining the peace of the *natural world*, 'tis owing that all things above and below, are kept within their prescribed bounds, which otherwise they would soon quit, and thereby introduce immediate ruin and desolation; and so in the *moral world*, or the world of mankind, he lays a secret restraint upon the exorbitant lusts and passions of men, and says to them, as to the waves of the sea, *thus far shall ye come, and no farther*. Moral evils, by which alone the peace of the moral world is discomposed, he *only permits*, and that for wise reasons, at the same time making it the duty of all mankind, to do those things by which the tranquillity and order of the world are secured; and by the advantages

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or disadvantages attending their different behaviour, making it as much their interest to mind these things as it is their duty. Above all, God has exprest his regard to peace, by sending his own Son from heaven to earth, to mediate a peace between earth and heaven; the natural consequence of which peace, would be peace on earth, or among men, the peace between God and them being first made: and the more effectually to promote peace, God has imparted *his holy Spirit, the fruit of which is peace*; from this Spirit flows that heavenly wisdom *which is peaceable*, and that divine charity *which seeketh not her own*, but the things of others, and consequently seeketh peace with all; from whence it follows, that the church of God, in its original design, in its whole frame and constitution, and in the tendency of all its laws, is a *kingdom of peace*. And certainly upon the whole, nothing can be more evident, than that the title of the *God of peace*, which is that by which God makes himself known under the *gospel*, is not assumed without reason; for as much, as he must needs be a lover of peace, having done all necessary on his part to promote it; and that since God is a lover of peace, all persons of a pacifick temper appear to be his

Gal. v. 22. James iii. 17. 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

his children, in that they so nearly resemble him.

2. THE title of the *children of God*, will be acknowledged due to those who love and make peace, by the world it self, and in this sense they *shall be called the children of God*. It may be observed, that men oftner practise, than judge wrong, particularly in the present case: whatever disturbance and confusion may be occasioned by the violence of their passions, which too few, alas, take so much care to govern as they should, they cannot but confess, that as many as preserve a command over themselves, and by that means are capable of discharging the duties of their proper station, without infringing upon the peace of society, and even contributing a great deal towards it, are upon this account deserving of the highest esteem, behave in a manner most worthy the reasonable nature, and have the honour to bear the nearest resemblance to the divine. The *peacemaker* has almost always a witness in every man's breast, and very often the world gives open testimony to him; and even they praise and commend the example who do not care to follow it; so much interest has virtue left in the generality of those who are not willing to exercise so much self-denial as is required to the constant

constant and thorough practice of it. After the heart is corrupted, the judgment retains much of its integrity, and men approve in others, what they find some excuse or other, for neglecting themselves: now even this is no small matter, when a person has a *good report of all men, and of the truth it self*; the good name he enjoys, as it administers reasonable ground of pleasure and satisfaction, so it puts him in a capacity of doing more good; and especially when all or the greatest part of a society, are at peace among themselves, it awakens the attention of the world about them, and obligeth them to own, that *God is among them of a truth*; such a society may well be termed divine, not only standing upon a foundation laid by God himself, but adorned likewise with those virtues, which are divine and Godlike; and, perhaps, it is with respect to this, that our Saviour in the Text saith, *blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*; his meaning may be, that his *church*, if the members of it governed themselves by the rules which he laid down, particularly in respect of a quiet peaceable behaviour, would be a most happy society of men, would by degrees attract the love and admiration of the world about them, and convince mankind, that whatever pretensions some might make to a nearer alliance

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with the Deity, these were *his children* indeed, that God dwelt among them, that the religion they profest they had received from him, and that therefore they could not do better, than to list themselves in their number. And I make no doubt, that the peaceable behaviour of the *first* christians, added to their other exemplary virtues, was one principal means of procuring them a fair hearing, and disposing all those who had the least goodness, or impartiality to yield themselves to the evidences of the christian religion, when they beheld the excellent fruits it produced in the lives of its professors.

3. God will own and treat those that love and make peace, *as his children*, and by the distinction he makes between them and others, as it were say, *these are my children*. —He will in some sort own them for his children in this life, but most eminently and illustriously in the life to come.

1. *In this life* God will in some sort own the lovers of peace for *his children*; he will blot out their iniquities, receive them graciously, and love them freely; he will give them his Spirit, which shall enable them to cry *Abba, Father*. To them especially who are most remarkable for a peaceable spirit, are granted the greatest measures of the spirit of adoption, of freedom, and of consolation; we may say emphatically of such persons,
great

great peace have they that love peace. It is no wonder, if God shows how much he delights in persons of this character, by bestowing on them a calm and tranquility of mind, which few others can boast of, and which shedding its influence upon their whole conversation and deportment, is a kind of visible mark, by which they are declared to be the special favourites of the most high; over these the Providence of God is peculiarly watchful, directing their steps, procuring them honour and favour in the sight of men, and making *all things to work together for their good.*

2. THE principal time of God's owning the lovers of peace for *his children*, and treating them as such is *in the life to come*, when they shall rest from all their labours, and receive the reward of them in the most ample degree; particularly of their *labours of love*, when they shall enter upon the possession of that *inheritance to the hope of which they are now begotten; even an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them;* shall have their *bodies redeemed from corruption*, and thereby become *sons of the resurrection*; then shall it appear that a peaceable behaviour now, leads to everlasting peace; yea, that the way of peace is the

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way

§ 1 Pet. i. 3. Rom. viii. 21. Luke xx. 36.

way of true glory; for as God is now glorified by persons eminent for this character, so he will be glorified in them hereafter, while they *shine out as stars in the firmament of heaven for ever and ever*. Now we know that the *sons of peace are the sons of God*,^h but it does not yet appear what *such shall be* (how glorious, how happy their lot) *only this we know, that when he, the God of peace shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory*; and then not the least room will remain for doubting who are the *children of God*, for who should they be but those who are received into the immediate presence of God, array'd in robes of unfading lustre, and made to drink of those rivers of pleasure, that never cease flowing from the fountain of life.

I shall conclude with a short *Application* of this subject.

I. IF the *peacemakers* are the *children of God*, whose children must they be who *love strife and contention*? can these be the *children of God* who are so exceeding unlike him, hate the peace he loves, and love the contention which he hates, and delight in what he has forbidden? are these the marks of God's children? certainly no; if such as these conceit themselves to be the *children of God*, they know not what
spirit

^h 1 John iii. 2.

spirit they are of; they do not observe what is their prevailing inclination from which they are to be denominated: they that are declared enemies to peace, can hardly be supposed other than enemies to an holy life, since such a life implies order and regularity, which he who loves in one case cannot well hate in another; besides, that it is difficult to imagine that the Spirit of God will dwell with a spirit of contention, I mean a spirit *habitually* contentious, not one that may happen to be carried away by the force of an extraordinary temptation. And what then are we to think of those men, or nations, that are so celebrated in history, for their conquests and achievements? I don't mean those who acquit themselves bravely when the defence of their country, and of their laws and liberties makes it necessary to have recourse to arms, but those who cannot have any quiet themselves while others enjoy it, love to enslave and tyrannize over their fellow creatures, *et cum solitudinem fecerunt, pacem appellant*, "and when they have left none to oppose them, call the *solitude*, and *desolation* they have made by the name of *peace*;" shall we praise such men as these; or esteem this to be *true greatness* of soul? We shall not, if we think and speak as God by his holy oracles teaches us to do. That is the noble character which bespeaks

men to be the *children of God*; as for any other, whatever blaze it may make for a little while, it will go out in darkness. If we hope therefore to be entitled to the *blef-
sing* in the Text,

2. LET us apply our selves to deserve the character of *peacemakers*; let us love peace, cherish in our selves this most excellent disposition, and labour to be examples of it. To this purpose I shall recommend a few *directions* among many others.

1. LET us lay the foundation of peace with others, by peace in and with our selves. A guilty mind, or turbulent and unruly affections, are inconsistent with this inward peace; and where this inward peace is wanting, that secret uneasiness which men are under, disposes them but too commonly to fall out with their fellow creatures. The easy mind, full of a continual complacency and satisfaction in its self, is ever the most benevolent, and inclined to live in friendship and amity with every one else. The *peaceful*, and the *peaceable* spirit generally go together; but now if we suppose a man to live under the tormenting reflections of a guilty conscience, which is perpetually accusing him, and presents to him nothing but terrour and destruction, in what condition can such a person be to cultivate peace with others? Let him first begin at home; let him

him without delay makes his peace with his own conscience, and with the offended majesty of heaven, that being happy in his own apprehension, he may take pleasure in advancing the happiness of others; and as a means requisite to their mutual happiness, study how to preserve all things in peace. The passions of the mind are another thing which every man is obliged to look after, who proposes to have peace with himself, and with others; all inordinate and ungovernable passions, first disturb the peace of a man's own breast, and from thence spread their unhappy influence into conversation and society; the tumult and disorder of the passions within, will almost unavoidably affect the external behaviour. The Apostle *James* has decided this matter in that question, ⁱ *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even from your lusts that war in your members?* The more lusts a man nourishes in his bosom, and the more outrageous any lust is, the more frequent disappointments, and the greater opposition he will necessarily meet with in the world, which will make him an enemy to those from whom this opposition, and these disappointments come, or are apprehended to come. It behoves us more especially to guard against

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ⁱ James iv. 1.

some particular affections, such as an *inordinate self love*, a *love of power*, and *dominion*, and *prebeminence*, the *love of money*, and the workings of *envy*. He that is wrapt up in himself, and his own private interest, will be apt to mistake in the true way of promoting his own interest, and apprehending the interests of others to interfere with it, will be ready to declare war against them upon that account. He that loves power as the greatest good, and cannot be content if he has not others subject to him, and dependent upon him, will be angry with all those who do not readily acknowledge his superiority, especially if they pretend to be upon a level with him. The covetous man, who idolizes the world, will be sure to meet with as many competitors, as there are persons of the same inclinations with himself; and from competitions for the world, jealousies and disputes will naturally arise. To the envious man, not only the happiness, but even the virtue of another, shall be a sufficient ground of quarrel; the more you deserve his esteem, the less you shall have of his affection. We must therefore endeavour to subdue this, and every other evil disposition and affection in our minds, and to have them possess of the contrary good qualities, such as *charity* and *benevolence*, *humility*, *contempt of the world*,

world, and the like; the effect of which will be, that we shall enjoy our selves in peace and quietness, and without any difficulty be able to maintain peace (as far as our duty is concerned) with the whole world.

2. THINK of the temptations, which in the course of your business, or in conversing with others, you may be under to transgress the bounds of your duty in this respect, and provide against them. A great part, perhaps the greater, of the sins of good men, proceed from *surprize*, which should certainly be a caution to them to be forearmed.

3. OFTEN revolve in your minds, the excellent motives to this duty of peaceableness, by which it is so strongly enforced. The proof of the duty is soon over, but the difficulty is, to bring our selves heartily into the love and practice of it. And here, the several motives to any part of a right practice come in, which are such, so persuasive, and of so great variety, that where they are duly considered, there is hardly any temper but feels the force of them more or less. Let us therefore seriously attend to these motives, which the more frequently, and diligently we turn them over in our minds, we shall find them more powerfully urging us to comply with
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the exhortations of scripture, and the dictates of our own consciences. And this gives me occasion to mention a few of these motives to a *peaceable* temper and behaviour.

I. CONSIDER the *example* which our Lord and Master, has set us of the virtue, which he here recommends to our pursuit. He is prophesied of under this very character of the ^k *Prince of peace*; immediately after which it is added, *of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end.* He came to make peace between God and man, between Jew and Gentile, ^l *that he might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, and gather together all things in himself, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth*: the spirit of his religion breathes nothing but peace, hither tend all the doctrines, and promises, and precepts of his gospel, which if they were received and entertained as they ought to be, would produce universal tranquillity; and his practice was suitable to his doctrine according to what was foretold of him, ^m *that he should not cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.* It is true he himself says he ⁿ *came not to send peace but a sword*; but this expresses not his design in

^k Isa. ix. 6, 7. ^l Col. i. 20.— ^m Isa. xlii. 1, 2.
ⁿ Matt. x. 34.

in planting the gospel, but merely the event. Such was the contrariety of the pure and holy doctrines of christianity to the lusts of men, that it might be expected from all those who were madly set upon their lusts, that they would oppose it, and declare themselves enemies to such as embraced it; in which case, who does not see, that though the Gospel was the innocent occasion, yet the lusts of men were the true, the culpable cause of all the commotions and persecutions that attended the settlement of christianity in the world? To which I might add, that though *Jews* and *Heathens*, were enemies to the *Christians*, yet the Primitive Christians were no enemies to them, shewing a readiness to live in peace with all the world, as they actually did among themselves more than the professors of any other religion.

2. CONSIDER the present advantages of a peaceable temper and behaviour. It may be truly said of all the commandments of Christ, that *in keeping of them there is great reward*; of this particularly, *peaceableness* being among those virtues, which in some degree, reward themselves. As the peace of a virtuous mind has a tendency to produce a peaceable demeanour (which I observed before) so, in return, a constant peaceableness of demeanour tends to establish and increase the peace of the mind.

Amidst

Amidst all the contentions, and angry disputes of this troublesome world, the *peaceable* man has great satisfaction in thinking that he is not chargeable with them, that he has done his part to make peace; and, as he has this testimony in himself, so very often from others too, who declare their value for persons of his character and temper, by chusing them for *arbitrators* and *judges* in their differences. Now, the friendship and respect of mankind, when obtained by such methods as these, are not things to be despised; and when added to that enjoyment, which a virtuous man has of himself within, prove it to be worth any man's while to be a lover of peace, were it only out of a regard to present happiness.

3. CONSIDER that a *peaceable* demeanour, is a fit introduction to everlasting peace. The time is coming, when they that love peace shall be satisfied with the abundance of it; death is the last strife with them; after that *they enter into peace*, a peace that passeth all understanding, that is never interrupted, and that never ends, arising not from a cessation of all action, like the *rest* of the grave, but from the perfection of knowledge and love, and the utmost regularity of all the powers and faculties of our nature. Heaven is the region of peace; since the apostate spirits were banished from thence, there

there has been no war, nor rumour of war there, nothing to disturb the sacred order and profound tranquillity of the heavenly kingdom. The general assembly of holy and happy spirits, is but one grand fraternity, among whom the only contest is, who shall love God and one another most. And who then that rightly weighs things, would not ingage in this generous contest now, that striving together in the cause of peace and charity now, they may have a foretaste of heaven upon earth, and at their departure out of this troublesome life, be received into mansions of everlasting rest and felicity?





S E R M O N VIII.

The sufferers for righteousness sake
described.

MATT. V. IO.

*Blessed are they that are persecuted
for righteousness sake; for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven.*

IN these words *two* or *three* things are implied, or supposed, which I shall briefly consider, before I come to speak to that which is the chief import of them.—It is implied, that the cause of Christ is the cause of *righteousness and truth*—that as many as heartily espoused his cause at that time, must expect to suffer *persecution* for it—and that whatever else men were persecuted for, if it was not for *righteousness sake*, they had no share in the *blessedness* promised by Christ to his faithful followers.

I. IN

I. IN these words of our Saviour it is plainly implied, that his cause was the cause of *righteousness and truth*. These two were, in effect, one and the same thing; this he implicitly affirms, in making use of these two expressions as equivalent, calling that *persecution for his sake* in the next verse, which in the Text he styles *persecution for the sake of righteousness*: and it was not without reason, that he speaks thus honourably of himself, and his doctrine, since, as they both in a manner justified themselves, the holiness of his life, being an immediate vindication of him, and the intrinsic excellence of his doctrine, an evident mark of the truth of that, so they had both a miraculous attestation given them from heaven; God bore witness to the mission of Christ, by the extraordinary powers with which he invested him, and thereby to the truth of his religion. The *Jewish* religion, contained in the *scriptures* of the *Old Testament*, tho' a divine revelation, and sufficiently proved to be such, yet had not all that evidence which attended the establishment of *christianity*. And, indeed, the *christian* religion being designed alike for all nations, and all nations where it came being obliged under the highest penalties, to receive and entertain it, it was necessary that the arguments

to

to convince men of its being *worthy of all acceptation*, should be proportionably clear and strong, otherwise the wisdom of God would not have been so conspicuous, in making the *cause* equal to the *effect* intended to be produced by it, the conversion of the world to the faith of the gospel; nor their guilt so great and inexcusable, who refused to become the disciples of Jesus Christ. But when the light shone with that brightness that all must see it, unless those that were wilfully blind, and the voice of God proclaiming, *this is my beloved Son*, was so intelligible as to be heard by all who did not shut their ears against it, their obligation to embrace the gospel, was indispensable, and their condemnation most just if they did not. The *christian* religion deserves the name of *righteousness*, not only for this general reason that has been now given, that it is *truth*, but upon another and more peculiar account, for *therein is the righteousness of God revealed*, and by that men are called to the practice of *universal righteousness and goodness*. Christianity is not a *speculative*, but *practical* science; the instruction of the understanding is designed to lead the way to the purification of the heart, and the intire change of the life.

2. ANOTHER thing implied in the words is, that as many as at that time heartily espoused the cause of Christ, might reasonably expect to suffer persecution for it. Our Saviour never went about to disguise the matter and to keep the dangers and inconveniencies out of their sight, to which they would expose themselves, but plainly tells them upon what terms they must be his disciples, *viz.* ^a *denying themselves, taking up their cross, and forsaking all to follow him*; and he would have them sit down and calmly count the cost, before they entered themselves in his service; this he did, that they might not be surprised and unprepared, when they found things to be otherwise than he had told them, but be provided for the worst that could befall them; and well knowing too, that after all things were duly weighed and considered, they must, notwithstanding the melancholy prospect they had before them from the present world, make choice of him for their master. The general reason of that ill treatment which the *first* disciples of Christ met with, is mentioned *John* xv. 19. where, having exhorted them to *love one another*, and so much the rather as they were to look for the hatred of the world,

^a Matt. xvi. 24.— Luke xiv. 26.—

he tells them, *if ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* Neither the doctrine nor manners of Christ and his disciples, were suited to the taste of a degenerate age; they did by both condemn the world of folly and wickedness, instead of flattering it, which is what the world loves; the religion of Christ, was quite opposite to the religions of the world, and not only to the established religions, but likewise to the vices that universally prevailed, and the notions of pleasure and happiness which every where passed current: and suitable to the religion of Christ, was his life and conversation, and that of all his genuine followers, they were another sort of men, as unlike the rest as if they were not of the same race; though they were born among them, yet they appeared as foreigners, come from some remote country, never before heard of, whose customs ran counter to their own, and their actions, and aims looked all another way. And was it to be thought, that a company of men, obscure in their original, few in number, with none of those things to recommend them, that the world values and admires, poor and illiterate, could undertake to teach the wise and the learned, to reprove the mighty and the

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the powerful, and to reform all mankind ; to convince men, that what they called *religion*, was *impiety*, what they called *wisdom*, no other than *madness* and *folly*, and many of those things which ^b *they esteemed most highly*, were an *abomination to the Lord* ; and in a word, *to turn the world, as it were, upside down* ; was it to be thought, that persons in such circumstances could attempt such things as these, and not find a great deal of opposition ? It was not to be expected, neither did they expect it, but as men who set out upon long and perillous voyages, they considered before-hand the hardships they must suffer, and armed themselves against them.

3. IT is implied that whatever else men were persecuted for, if it was *not for righteousness sake*, they had no claim to the *blessedness* promised in the Text. They might *name the name of Christ*, but that would be to little purpose, if they did not *depart from iniquity* ; they might suffer, but if they ^c *suffered justly*, it could not be *for righteousness sake*, nor for his sake who was a lover of *righteousness* ; they might have *all manner of evil said against them*, but then it must be *falsely*, and really for the sake of their master, or it could not

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^a Luke xvi. 15.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 20.

truly be called *persecution*, much less *persecution for the truth*. The cause of mens sufferings, makes a considerable difference between them: accordingly the Apostle *Peter*, writing to the christian converts, saith,
^a *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of grace resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on yours he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as a busy body in other mens matters: they must not think that their master would own them in any such practices as these; no, but if they acted so little like his disciples, and so much like his enemies, as he delivered them up to be punished for their crimes in this life, so without repentance, he would do the same in the next, professing in the sight and hearing of all, that he did not know them. It was very possible, that if they behaved ill, they might be more severely dealt with for being christians, but they must thank themselves for it, and not imagine that Christ was any way in their debt, whose religion suffered more in its credit by their means, than they did for their profession of that; nay, if they were persecuted directly for their religion, and because they would not re-*

^a 1 Pet. iv. 14, 15.

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renounce it, yet, in case they did not lead a sober, righteous, and godly life, as that religion teacheth them to do, they would not be among the persons meant by our Saviour, when he saith, *blessed are they that suffer for righteousness sake*; for were they really lovers of righteousness, they would live conformably to their religion, as well as manifest a readiness to suffer for it, I might have said to die for it, since, if their resolution should go as far as this, the principle that governed them not being right, *martyrdom* itself would not atone for want of love to God in the heart; according to St. Paul's decision of this very case, who saith expressly, *though I give my body to be burned and have not charity*, (divine and brotherly love) *it profiteth me nothing*; not that I imagine such a case as this has often happened; but if it had not been possible, the Apostle would not have put it, and we have no reason to think, but that among the great numbers that have laid down their lives for their religion, there have been some, though but few, of this character, having partly been acted by natural courage, partly by vain glory, or it may be a conceit, that by such a sacrifice, they should expiate for the errors of a sinful life, though, if they had lived, they would not have sacrificed

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1 Cor. xiii. 3.

their sins themselves. In a word, if we are not persecuted *for righteousness sake*, in the full extent of that word, we have no claim to the *blessedness* in the Text; and this brings me to consider the words according to the express and direct meaning of them.—And here I shall

I. SPEAK to this part of the christian's *character*. And

II. INQUIRE into the *blessedness* promised to it.

I. I SHALL endeavour to explain this part of the christian's *character*, shewing in some particulars, what sort of persons they are, that are here described.—They are unfeignedly desirous of being acquainted with the true religion—having the knowledge of the true religion, they enter with all their heart and soul into the profession and practice of it—and they persevere in this profession and practice with that constancy, that none of the terrors of this world can prevail with them to depart from their duty.

I. THE persons here intended, are unfeignedly desirous of knowing and understanding the true religion; they have that *good and honest heart*, which opens to the truth,

^f Luke viii. 15.

truth, when it appears with proper evidence, and rejoices in having found it. The miser cannot be so well pleased when he lights upon some hidden treasure, as persons of this temper are, when they are satisfied of their being in possession of the mind and will of God; they are described after a very lively manner in that *parable* of our Saviour's, which represents the *kingdom of heaven by treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man has found, he conceals the matter, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he has, and buys that field*; for such is their notion of divine truth, which they esteem as of greater value, than any worldly treasure whatever, and consequently discovering the gospel to have all the marks and evidences of divine truth, they cordially assent to it, and think themselves happy in the enjoyment of it. There is nothing of greater importance to men, than the knowledge of the true religion, nor any thing about which, all those of a well-disposed mind, are more concerned; they had rather mistake any where else than here, rather lie under an error that affects their greatest temporal interest, than one that endangers the salvation and happiness of their souls; for they believe that they have souls that are of more worth than the whole world;

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they believe that the knowledge of God, what he is, and how he will be worshipped and served here, and may be enjoyed hereafter, is the most necessary means of their salvation, and that therefore it is a thing exceeding desirable, that God would reveal himself to the world; this being the disposition of their minds, and the sense they have of things, the gospel is most welcome to them, believing it to be a revelation from God, wonderfully suited to all the necessities of their fallen condition; and so likewise all the particular doctrines of the gospel, as far as they comprehend them; they would not be without the knowledge of the gospel, upon any account, nor chuse to be ignorant of those truths which belong, tho' remotely, to the scheme of man's redemption.

2. HAVING got the knowledge of the true religion, they enter with all their heart and soul into the profession and practice of it; they lodge the truth in their hearts, but not so as to keep it concealed there; as ^h *they believe in their hearts, so with their mouth they make confession unto salvation*; they openly rejoice, and glory in Christ Jesus, *confess him before men*, and would have all men know, that they are his disciples, there being in their account, no title more honourable; and that they may not dishonour Christ,

^h Rom. x. 10. Matt. x. 32.

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Christ, by making a profession of his religion, they are solicitous to have their *conversation becoming the gospel* they profess; they have a high value for the *precepts* of the gospel, as well as for the *doctrines* and *promises* of it, and declare it by making these *precepts* the rule of all their actions; this is their profession, and this their practice; they profess to know Christ, and to love and honour him; nor while they profess this in words, do they in their works deny him; their lives are an evidence of the sincerity of their profession, and contribute not a little to convince those, who are disposed to be convinced, of the truth of their religion too. And oh, how happy is it when these two are joined together, a bold, but humble and unaffected profession of religion, and a life uniformly and thoroughly influenced by it! When this is the case, it may be hoped, that men are prepared to defend the truth, at the expence of every thing dear to them in this world, since, for the sake of it, they have sacrificed every opposite affection, and made it their business to practise the most difficult lessons of christianity. Such a profession and practice of christianity as this, will naturally beget a resolution, upon no consideration whatsoever to relinquish it; that, after having *done the will of God*, they may not lose their crown for refusing

fusing to suffer for it too. The leading of a holy and christian life implies, a man's having overcome the temptations and allurements of the world; which, whoever has done, will be the more easily enabled to go through the persecutions of it, as he may more reasonably expect greater measures of divine *grace*, to enable him to do it; which leads me to another particular which compleats their character, *viz.*

3. THEIR persevering with that constancy in this good profession and practice, that none of the terrors of this world can prevail with them to forsake the truth. With a humble sense of their own weakness and trust in ¹ *Christ who strengtheneth them*, each of them is ready to say as *Peter*, ^k *though I die with thee, yet will I not deny thee*; and they not only say this, but do it, when called upon to make good their engagements: the furnace only proves the truth of their profession, and ¹ *their faith being much more precious than gold, though it be tried by the fire, is found unto praise, and honour, and glory now, and much more, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.* This trial did many of the *primitive christians* undergo, whom *nothing was able to separate from the love of Christ*; neither tribulation,

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¹ Phil. iv. 13.

^k Matt. xxvi. 34.

¹ 1 Pet.

i. 7.

nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor perils, nor sword; the depths of adversity, no more than the height of prosperity; present sufferings, no more than the prospect of what might be to come; the dread of death, no more than the love of life; ^m they counted not their lives dear to them, when they could make an offering of them to their Saviour, to whom they considered themselves indebted, for something more valuable than life itself, even for the hope of eternal salvation: it was plain that their love to the truth, was not an idle boast, when the greatest torments could not extort from them a denial of it. The *first* converts to christianity, were made partly from among the *Jews*, and partly from among the *Gentiles*, and both these were persecuted by their own *countrymen*, though the first opposition that was raised, was chiefly from the unbelieving *Jews*, against those of their brethren who believed in one, whom the main body of their nation had rejected; but it was not long before the unbelieving *Heathens*, fell into the same persecuting methods, and by a variety of discouragements and ill usage, endeavoured to make those that had embraced the gospel, out of love with it, and others afraid to take up the profession of it; but both alike in vain,

^m Acts xx. 24.

vain, since the more the word of God, and the professors of it were opposed, the more they grew and multiplied; till at last, having withstood all storms, *christianity* became the reigning religion in several parts of the world. But, even after this, when *Jewish* and *Heathen* persecutions ceased, persecution was not at an end; before, the enemies were without the church, afterwards within it; one party of christians persecuted another; and the *apostate* part of the church, that part that was *sound*, with so much fury and violence, that all the cruelties of the *Heathen* were as nothing, compared to the tender mercies of some, who would needs pass for the *only christians*. And though, blessed be God, these persecutions too, are pretty well over, especially in this nation, whether it be that men want opportunity, or are come to a better mind, yet those that are in all things willing to keep a good conscience, and resolved to follow truth, as it appears to them, without considering whether herein they shall follow the fashion or no, may depend upon it, that they shall not escape all persecution, in lesser instances at least; they must expect to meet with difficulties and reproaches, to be evil-spoken of for that which deserves commendation, to be pursued with the spiteful clamours of uncharitable zealots, and to find the love of
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some of their friends to grow cold; and tho' these are trifles in comparison of *Pagan* and *Antichristian* persecutions, yet whatsoever it be that men suffer, when it is for a good conscience, or *righteousness sake*, they shall not lose their reward; as long as they are conscious to themselves, that they do not act out of a spirit of pride, and contention, or a love of singularity, but from a sincere desire to know the mind of Christ, and to keep as close to it as they can; and they neither lose their patience, nor charity, whatever treatment they meet with; they are blessed, even more blessed in this respect than those that use them so hardly, though otherwise good men.—I have now finished the *character* of the persecuted for *righteousness sake*, and proceed

II. TO CONSIDER their *blessedness*. *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*—*Theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, whether we understand that phrase of the kingdom of *grace*, or of the kingdom of *glory*.

I. *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven* under the present dispensation of *grace*. Men thus determined, and resolved to follow truth, at all hazards, were the best prepared to enter into this kingdom; they had one very necessary qualification for a disciple of Christ

Christ, the love of the truth, and a contempt of all dangers and difficulties, in the acquisition, or maintainance of it. ⁿ *The kingdom of heaven* being to be taken by violence, these were the men by whom it was to be taken; it was a kingdom not yet established, and the establishment of which, it might be foreseen, would not be an easy or unexpensive task, but obliged those who professed themselves subjects of it, to declare war, against the world, the flesh and the devil: in such a state of things there was need of courage, if they were minded to lift themselves under the banner of Christ, and to ^o *fight the good fight of faith*; this I say might be easily foreseen, by those who considered the nature of the christian doctrine, and the temper and circumstances of the world at that time; and the same was foretold them, ^p *that thro' much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God*. "Be it so," was the language of these resolute souls, since we cannot have it upon easier terms. But what could be expected from mean and cowardly spirits, who were *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, and feared not so much to *sin*, as to *suffer*? Were these fitted to take up the profession of a religion which, as to the present world, promised

ⁿ Matt. xi. 12. ^o 1 Tim. vi. 12. ^p Acts. xiv. 22.

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promised so little and threatned so much? If such as these ranged themselves on the side of christianity, it must be a hasty act, and for want of attending soberly to the consequences of it. We have therefore ^a *the fearful* and the *unbelieving* joined together as fit company, and their doom pronounced, which is dreadful indeed, *the fearful and the unbelieving—shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.* See the sad effects of this mistaken fear. It tempts men to unbelief, which excludes them from the society of the saints on earth, and consigns them to the society, and punishment of apostate spirits hereafter. And then the kingdom of *grace* belonged to men of this spirit upon another account, for as it secured them an entrance into this kingdom, so likewise the continued possession of it; they did not obtain a place in this kingdom and then lose it again, for want of resolution to maintain their post, which is the case of too many, who engaging precipitantly in the christian cause, at the prospect of danger *draw back to perdition*; while those brave persons of whom I am speaking ^r *believed to the saving of their souls: ^s to their faith in Christ they added fortitude* in the profession of it, and *by patient continuance in well doing,* successfully

^a Rev. xxi. 8. ^r Heb. x. 39. ^s 2 Pet. i. 5.
Rom. ii. 7.

successfully sought, glory, honour, and immortality; while the ^u stony ground bearers, who had no root in themselves, endured only for a while, because when tribulation or persecution arose for the words sake, by and by, they were offended; these received the word into good ground, where having depth of earth it did not wither away: or we may describe them by another similitude of our Saviour's, I mean that of the ^w wise man who built his house upon a rock; so that when the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, it fell not because it was founded upon a rock; so these persons heard the gospel, believed, professed, and practised it, and having laid the foundation well, were not soon to be shaken in mind but preserved in the good way they had chosen, notwithstanding all the difficulties that attended the doing and suffering the will of God, and being ^x faithful to the death, received a crown of life; which brings me to the other consideration.

2. *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of glory; they inherit it in common with all the saints of the most high; for all whom, without distinction, are laid up such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither can enter into the heart of man to comprehend;*

^u Luke viii. 11. — ^w Matt. vii. 24. — ^x Rev. ii. 10.

hend; their joy will be full, their reward great, as that of all good men will be in the kingdom of their father, and therefore *blest* are they tho' nothing else could be added; *blest* if the immediate presence of God, and the perpetual overflowings of his love, the sight of Jesus, the company of angels and perfected spirits, the absence of all evil, and the enjoyment of all good, can make them *blest*. But it has been always thought, that besides their common share, of the blessedness and glory of the holy state, the reward of *Martyrs* and *Confessors* has some extraordinary circumstances attending it, that their condition is, if I may so say, more exalted, and nearer to the throne of the Almighty, and that their crown shines with distinguished brightness; and whether so much be not implied in that *passage* of St. *John* deserves to be considered;
These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. This is true, of all the faithful servants of Jesus Christ, but, perhaps, in a somewhat peculiar sense, of those who have suffered great hardships, and even death

7 Rev. vii. 14, 15.

itself for the testimony which they held. However that be, since there is such a thing, as *an abundant entrance* into the kingdom of heaven, it is reasonable to think that *this abundant entrance* will be given to them who have had their constancy and firmness most strongly tried, other things being equal; besides which, a higher degree of triumph and exultation seems to be the natural consequence of that experience of the firmness and constancy of their minds, which is the fruit of patience under great tribulations and persecutions. If it should be inquired, why God has so great a regard for men of this character and disposition; or what it is that recommends them to the *blessedness* in the Text? I answer,

1. IT is in itself a very excellent disposition of soul.

2. THE example is of great use and benefit to the world.

3. GOD is remarkably glorified by persons of this temper and behaviour.—But the consideration of this must be reserved for another Discourse.



S E R M O N IX.

The blessedness of the persecuted
for righteousness sake represented.

MATTH. V. 10.

*Blessed are they that are persecuted
for righteousness sake; for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven.*

I N the preceding Discourse I observed that it is plainly implied in these words of our Saviour—that his cause was the cause of *truth* and *righteousness*—that as many as at that time heartily espoused the cause, might reasonably expect to suffer *persecution* for it—but that for whatever else they were persecuted, if it was not *for righteousness sake*, they had no claim to the *blessedness* in the Text. I then proceeded,

I. DISTINCTLY to explain this part of the christian's *character*, showing you what sort of persons are here described. They are unfeignedly desirous of being acquainted with the true religion—having the knowledge of the true religion, they enter with all their heart and soul into the profession and practice of it—and they persevere herein, unmoved by all the terrors of the world. I then advanced,

II. To represent their *blessedness*. *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, whether we understand that phrase of the kingdom of *grace*, or the kingdom of *glory*.—I am now to return an answer to this *inquiry*, why God has so great a regard to men of this *character* and *disposition*; or what it is that recommends them to the *blessedness* in the Text? I answer, God peculiarly approves such for the following reasons.

I. THE disposition of soul, by which *the persecuted for righteousness sake* are characterized, is, in itself, most excellent and praise-worthy; it expresses a true greatness of mind, a soul rightly informed, and rightly affected, that knows how to judge of the real worth of things, and to prefer what is truly valuable, to what is so only in vulgar opinion; a soul that converses in a higher region

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region than that of sense, or fancy; a soul that has a holy rectitude in its will and affections, by which it is prompted to pursue those objects with the greatest vehemence, which wisdom points out to it; and as a consequence of these two (that is, of an enlightened understanding, and a rectified bent of the will and affections) has a fixedness and steadiness in its resolutions, which preserves it unmoved in the midst of a sea of troubles; the assaults of adversity and persecution, serve only to show its strength, as the waves do of a rock, against which they dash and break; a soul that loves God, and its Saviour Jesus Christ, and that truth and righteousness, by which it comes to resemble these divine patterns, above all other things; and from the love and admiration, that possesses it of these glorious objects, is able to despise all the menaces of weak mortals, as well as the flatteries of a worthless world. Is not this a character that must render all that are possessed of it, dear to the supreme Being; a character constituted of the noblest qualities and endowments of knowledge, faith, love, and an heroick fortitude?

2. THE example is of great use and benefit to mankind; it draws their observation, awakens their attention, and disposes them to examine what there is in *truth* and *righteousness*, that makes their votaries ready to

undergo any sufferings, rather than part with them ; the effect of which attention and examination, very often is a conviction of the superior excellence of these things, and by degrees a conversion to them. The behaviour of the *Primitive* Christians was of admirable service in this respect, to spread the faith of a crucified Saviour, to give the world a better idea both of them and their religion, and to gain proselytes, not only from amongst the spectators of their invincible patience and courage under all their sufferings, but even among their informers and persecutors themselves, of which there are instances in christian *Antiquity* : they who were witnesses to their wonderful fortitude, joined with the greatest meekness and charity, could not, many times, but admire, and then acquit, and then approve, and at last applaud the men who behaved so bravely, with a resolution to *join themselves* to their number. Hence, in part, was the great success of the gospel in the first ages ; “ men, who suffered such things
“ for their religion, could not profess it out
“ of worldly views, they must be inwardly
“ persuaded of the truth of it ; and one
“ would think upon good grounds, otherwise they would not be so fond of embarking on so dangerous a bottom. Let us carefully examine, what reason they
“ have

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“ have for their confidence.” Now, *christianity* being a divine religion, the more it was examined and tried, did, like pure gold, so much the more approve its solid and intrinsic worth. A great many scandalous things were reported of the *Primitive Christians*, by their enemies, who this way, sought to discredit their cause ; these accusations having nothing to support them in the common conversation of the christians, which was virtuous and unblameable, would appear to be still more improbable, when the persons upon whom such things were charged, besides making a fair shew before men in their ordinary actions, rather than deny the faith, would part with every thing dear to them in the world, even with life itself. Thus *Justin Martyr*, giving an account of his own conversion to *christianity*, saith, “ I, who made profession of the *Platonick Philosophy*, hearing the christians calumniated, and at the same time, observing their contempt of death, and of all things that are reckoned most terrible, thought thus with myself, that the same persons could not be abandoned to vitious pleasures ; for who that is given to pleasures and intemperate in his desires, can willingly meet death, which takes from him all that he loves ? ”

BESIDES this benefit arising to mankind, from the example of these men, let us add

3. THAT God is peculiarly glorified by persons of this temper and behaviour. The *Evangelist* therefore, relating our *Saviour's* discourse with *Peter*, wherein he fore-tells the crucifixion of that Apostle, in these figurative expressions, ^a*When thou art old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, or have them stretched forth, and another shall gird, or bind thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not* naturally chuse to go, even to the cross; immediately adds, *this spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.* By the consent of all Antiquity, St. Peter was crucified in his old age; and suffering this cruel death for *righteousness sake*, he thereby glorified God. God is glorified by the christian behaviour of those that are *persecuted for righteousness sake*, not only as it promotes the true religion, (of which before) but,

1. As the power of divine *grace* is conspicuous in them, supporting them under their sufferings.

2. As the future reward, which is promised to the sufferers, and expected by them, is, by such a noble behaviour, declared

^a John xxi. 18, 19.

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ed to be abundantly sufficient to counter-
ballance all the evils and inconveniencies that
can be undergone for stedfastly adhering to
the truth.

I. GOD is glorified by those that are *per-
secuted for righteousness sake*, as the power of
his *grace* is conspicuous in them, supporting
them under their sufferings, and inabling
them to *glory in tribulation*. The strength
of human resolution alone, may be reckoned
sufficient, when nothing befalls us but what
is human or common to men; but when
persons are *tortured, not accepting deliverance*,
those of the weaker, as well as the manly
sex of every age, and of the most tender
and delicate, as well as robust constitutions;
when the most cruel usage, and death in the
most formidable shapes, cannot force them
to forsake their profession, what can be
otherwise thought, than that they are *di-
vinely assisted*? According to those words of
the Apostle Peter, ^b *If ye be reproached for
the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spi-
rit of glory and of grace, resteth upon you:
on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your
part he is glorified.* The persecuted christi-
an, is ^c *strong in the Lord, the power of Christ
resteth upon him, the strength of the one, is
made*

^b 1 Pet. iv. 14. ^c Ephes. vi. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 9.
¹ 1 Pet. i. 5.

made perfect in the weakness of the other, and by the power of God, he is kept through faith unto salvation; this manifestation of the power of God, redounds to the glory of his truth, being an evident proof, that he is faithful who has promised, that he will not suffer any who put their trust in him, to be tempted above what they are able to bear, nor forsake them in their greatest extremities. And,

2. THE future reward promised to the christian sufferer, and expected by him, is, by such a noble behaviour, declared to be abundantly sufficient to counterballance all the evils and inconveniencies that can be undergone for stedfastly adhering to a good cause. They show that they ^a*see him who is invisible, and have respect unto the unseen recompence of reward; and are so animated by it, as almost to forget that they are in the body, and not to feel the infirmities of the human nature; 'for this cause they faint not, but though their outward man perish, yet their inward is renewed day by day; for they consider that their light affliction, which is but for a moment, (light and tolerable comparatively speaking) will work out for them a far more exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory; while they look not at things which are seen, but at the things which are*

^a Heb. xi. 26, 27. ^c 2 Cor. iv. 16.—

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are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal: and thus they, by one and the same action, justify their own wisdom, and the goodness, and mercy of God; their own wisdom, in estimating the good and evil things of this life, by their relation to the objects of eternity, and the goodness and mercy of God, who does not forget their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, but first by his grace assisting them, inables them to overcome, and then of his immense benignity, rewards their victory with everlasting peace and triumph. And thus the objection is fully answered against the Providence of God, for delivering the righteous into the hands of the wicked. What if he does so, since it serves many valuable purposes, gives his servants an opportunity for the exercise and improvement of a temper of soul, that is in itself most admirable, to set the world an example of the greatest benefit to it; and to glorify God in the day of visitation, since, it is but for a little time, that he seems to neglect his friends, and to countenance his enemies, does not permit any sincere soul to be over-born, and by the evils, and infelicities, and sufferings of this transitory state, trains up his faithful servants for the happiness of an everlasting world? Who, that seri-

seriously and impartially considers all this, will think there is any weight in this *objection*? that will not rather (I will not say *acquit* the Providence of God, for that is too low a term) but acknowledge the methods of it to be exceeding wise and gracious?

I SHALL close all with a brief *Application* of this subject.

1. IF *blessed* are the *persecuted for righteousness sake*, what shall we think of them that *persecute*? Are these also *blessed*? Just the contrary may be argued from these words of our Saviour. The temper of mind that fits a man calmly and patiently to bear *persecution*, is very different from that which makes him delight in *persecuting* and where the tempers are so opposite, can the reward, the beatitude be the same? It is what no *christian* will pretend to say, *that the Heathen persecutors did well*; but then some may be ready to think, the reason of that was, that they persecuted the *truth*, and that their whole guilt came from hence. It must be confessed, that this was a great *aggravation* of their guilt, that they expressed so much hatred against a religion which carried with it plain evidences of its divine original; but was this all they were blameable for, that their sinful prejudices made them
blind.

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blind to the *truth* of christianity? No, surely; but that *wicked temper* they discovered (being a mixture of pride and cruelty) would, though their cause had been much better, and that of the christians much worse than it was, have rendered them inexcusable. Do we ever hear our Saviour comforting his followers under their persecutions, that the time will come, when the *right side* will be *triumphant*, and then, when they had got the power into their hands, they might have the pleasure in their turn, to persecute all who differed from them? We have no such language as this in all the *New Testament*; but christians are every where, both by their *Master* himself, and by his *Apostles*, exhorted to *do good for evil*, to *forgive their enemies*, to *pray for their persecutors*; (which certainly gives men very little encouragement to turn persecutors themselves) and in *meekness* to *instruct them that oppose themselves*. For men to plead that they only persecute out of zeal for the *truth*, is but a poor pretence; for, if it be so evident that they are in the right, it will be easy for them to defend their cause, by *good arguments*; and if this be otherwise not evident, *force* and *compulsion* will never bring men to think so. A cause will ever be suspected, that needs such methods to support it. Besides, allowing that

† Matt. v. 44. 2 Tim. ii. 24.

that the prevailing party have more *truth* of their side than others, may not others have *truth enough* to save them? As certainly they may, if their errors are consistent with *sincerity*, and their lives are such, as not to give the least occasion to call their *sincerity* in question. In a word, a spirit of persecution is not a christian spirit; at best it proceeds from great ignorance, and generally from great pride and uncharitableness, which are things, the most difficult in the world to be reconciled with the design, and the commands of the gospel. I might have observed, that the method of answering arguments by *persecution*, is a very ancient practice, and seems to carry in it, a confession that better replies are wanting; see *Acts* vi. 10, 11. where we read, that *those of the synagogue, when they were not able to resist the wisdom, and the spirit by which Stephen spake, suborned men, who said, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God:* not to mention this further, on the behalf of those who suffer persecution, that they may say as *Job* does in another case, * *Be it indeed, that I have erred, my error remaineth with myself, and I myself must answer for it to God.*

2. If they are *blessed that are persecuted for righteousness sake*, then what can be said for those who stand not in the day of trial; and much more for those notions that repre-

* *Job*. xix. 4.

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sent it *lawful*, in order to avoid persecution, to comply with every thing that is required of us by those in power, however contrary to our own inward sense, and persuasion of things? To be afraid to own the truth, when Providence calls us out to make open profession of it, is bad; to deny it much worse; but the worst of all, is to justify such a practice; and yet, even this has been done, both in times of old, and more lately. In some of the first ages of the church, there were those who passed under the name of *christians*, though they were very indifferent ones, that taught this abominable doctrine; so the *ecclesiastical Historian*, tells us of *Basilides*, (from whom came the sect of the *Basilidians*) "that he held it an indifferent thing, to eat of things offered to idols, and to deny the faith in time of persecution." That of our *Saviour* is express, and might have prevented any such doctrine as this, among all that owned his authority;

Whosoever will confess me before men, him will I also confess before my father who is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father who is in heaven: and, indeed, the reason of the thing will justify this method of proceeding, since christianity had never prevailed, if there had been none to profess it,

or

• Matt. x. 32, 33.

or if those that professed it, had renounced it again as soon as they were in danger of suffering for it; and the same argument may be used to those who own *natural* religion but disclaim *revealed*. Did mankind always act upon this cowardly principle, what hope could there be to see established errors dethroned and banished, truth recalled and placed in its room? Where is our love to truth, if we will suffer and lose nothing for it? And without love to truth and righteousness, where is our religion?

3. If only being *persecuted for righteousness sake*, entitles men to the *blessedness* in the Text, then 'tis in vain for any whose sufferings are justly deserved, to put them to the account of religion. It is the *cause* that makes the *Martyr*. And by this rule, that church which has made the most *Martyrs* of any denomination of men in the world (I mean the church of *Rome*) has the fewest to show of its own: it has indeed those whom it calls *Martyrs*, and as far as its power would reach, has translated them among the number of the *blessed*; but of what character have they been? Men that have been engaged in assassinations, plots, conspiracies, seditions and rebellions; these are the men that have been canonized by the church of *Rome*. But by what rules of language can it be said, that a man who murders,

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murthers, or conspires against his prince and country, and then receives the due reward of his evil doings, is *persecuted for righteousness sake*? Words must have new ideas fixed to them, before such actions as these can be accounted *righteous*.

4. LET us all resolve by the *grace* of God to persevere in the profession and practice of the true religion, and of every thing that we think to be a part of it, whatever it costs us. Let neither shame, nor fear induce us to go in any matter against our consciences. God himself is the guardian of truth, and conscience the viceroy of God. To the end we may stand in the evil day, let us endeavour to have our minds deeply possessed with the notion of the little worth and importance of those things, which are the general temptations with men to conceal and belye their sentiments, and the infinite moment of that everlasting reward, which we hazard the loss of by making bold with our consciences. Let us value the testimony of our own minds before the prospect of any worldly gain or pleasure, and be well established in *practical* christianity, which will be a likely means, under the influence of the divine *Spirit*, to preserve us from all dangerous errors, and to make us bold in the profession of the truth.

THE only motive with which I shall inforce this exhortation is, the *example* of our divine Master, ⁱ *who witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate*, and confirmed it by his sufferings and death, in the presence of innumerable spectators. The best man that ever lived in the world, of whom it may not only truly, but eminently be said, *the world was not worthy*, met with very ungrateful usage from the world; ^k *he came to his own*, and instead of being received by them as the dignity of his person, the evidence of his mission, and the nature of that gracious design upon which he came required, was vilified, reproached, and hated by them, and persecuted even to death. He, if ever any one did so, *suffered for righteousness sake*; he established the truth by the holiness of his life, and the many miraculous works that he performed; and when both these availed not, he sealed it, voluntarily sealed it with his blood, which he shed as a *Martyr*, as well as a *sacrifice*. His death was indeed, in the nature of a *double sacrifice*; a *sacrifice* to the holiness of God for the sins of mankind, and a *sacrifice* for the truth which he loved more than life; and in this latter view ^l *he has set us an excellent example, that we should follow his*

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 13.
ii. 21.

^k John i. 11.

^l 1 Pet.

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his steps. If we are called to it, can we suffer in a better cause than this, the cause of *truth* and *righteousness*, in which, and for which, the Son of God laid down his life? Is it nothing, or a small matter, to have such company and such an example? Should it not animate us *to run the race that is set before us*, and to struggle thro' all opposition, ^m *looking to Jesus the author, and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, willingly endured the cross, despising the shame?* Let us be prepared, in imitation of this most perfect example, to do good, and to suffer evil; and let us count nothing dear to us, so we may be conformed to our once crucified, but now exalted Saviour, may *finish our course with joy, and have an abundant entrance ministered to us, into his heavenly and everlasting kingdom.*

HAVING discoursed distinctly of these several *beatitudes*, I shall conclude with *three* or *four* general observations upon them.

I. I OBSERVE that *blessedness* is not only the mark of our *natural* desires, but that which we are encouraged to aim at, and pursue by the *gospel*. So that they are certainly in the wrong, who teach, "that men are obliged to do, and suffer
Q 2 " the

^m Heb. xii. 1. 2.

“ the will of God, without having a respect
 “ to a *present* or *future* reward :” as this is
 directly contrary to the *instincts* of nature,
 so likewise to the dictates of the most un-
 corrupted *reason*, and both to the *doctrine*
 and *example* of the Son of God. Can we
 possibly help desiring to be happy? Is
 not this desire one great spring of action
 in the human soul? Does not our religion
 propose several things to our belief and con-
 sideration, in order to move this spring in the
 most powerful manner? Or is any motive to
 a virtuous and holy life needless? Considering
 our nature as *sensible* Beings, as well as *in-
 tellectual*, and our condition as *compassed
 about with infirmities*, is the abstract con-
 templation of the beauty of holiness, the
 love of God for his absolute perfection,
 and a sense of our obligations to him,
 sufficient when alone, to ingage all the
 powers and faculties of our souls, in an
 active vigorous pursuit of our own perfec-
 tion and the glory of God? Not to ask,
 how it is possible to separate between the
 idea of a life of virtue and piety, and all
 advantage arising from it; between the
 glory of God, and our own happiness, as
 one principal thing from which this glory
 arises. We know that the most eminent
 saints have ^a *had respect to the recompence*
 of

^a Heb. xi. 26. and xii. 2.

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of reward, and that the Son of God himself was supported in his sufferings, by the prospect of *the joy set before him*: nor let it be said that if we look forward to the reward, it must not be as our *own happiness*, but only as the *glory of God* is concerned in it; neither *reason*, nor *revelation* knows any such nice distinction as this; a distinction, of which common minds, are not capable of forming a conception, and which can serve to no other end, with regard to souls that are more knowing and refined, than to perplex, without profiting them. Our master was too wise to do an *unnecessary* thing, and much more a thing that is a *hindrance* to perfection; and therefore annexed a *beatitude* to every duty, because he saw it would be of use, not only at the first entrance upon a religious life, but in our continual progress towards perfection. Let us only frame a right and worthy notion of the christian *blessedness*, and the more strongly our desires are carried out after it, the better it will be. And this leads me to a *second* observation.

2. TRUE *blessedness* consists not in those things of which ignorant and depraved minds fancy it to be made up. It is not a great name, or a great estate, or great power and influence; it is not the pride, or the pleasure of life that must make a man

happy; no, the things that are fitted to gratify the brute, and to accommodate and adorn this bodily life, can no more fill and satisfy the mind, than the qualities and endowments of the mind, and its most refined pleasures can strike the senses, and please the appetites of the body. The happiness we are inquiring after, is not the happiness of a mere *animal*, but of a *reasonable* Being; not of a creature whose existence terminates with the *present* life, but is commensurate with *eternity*; and for certain, the happiness of such a Being, cannot result from bodily qualifications, or from any present worldly enjoyments; but must proceed from the things here mentioned, from being subjects of the kingdom of heaven, having the comforts of religion, enjoying what we have of the world, be it more or less, with the blessing of God, which is the only thing that can make us *inherit the earth*; having the noblest desires of our souls, those after truth, and virtue, and righteousness filled and satisfied; obtaining mercy from God, seeing his face, and being invested with all the priviledges of his children; these things will make us truly blessed, and when perfectly enjoyed, will make us perfectly so. Here therefore, let us fix our choice; let no other objects entice our souls aside from this pursuit;

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suit; for however they may flatter our fancies and passions, and raise our expectations, they cannot possibly fill up our capacities, and give rest to our souls. And then having laid down this notion of happiness, we shall be better able to comprehend the truth of the next observation, which is,

3. THE only way to true *blestness*, is by the universal practice of true virtue and piety. If we have a right idea of happiness, we shall not attempt to find out any other method of obtaining it than this; not thinking it so much as possible, nor indeed desirous of seeking our end by any other means, than those which make a part of the end itself; for so in truth is virtue, a very great part of our happiness; which if we believe, how is it possible we should desire the perfection of holiness and goodness, and at the same time hope, or even wish to attain it, in a course of sinful indulgences? There is a natural connection between virtue and happiness, between the practice of piety, and the pleasures of it; between the christian's duty, and his reward; and this connection is made still more sure, and the prospect rendered more glorious and inviting by the *promise* of God; *It shall be well with the righteous.* We

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may

Isai. iii. 10.

may say *it is well* with him now in *several* respects, but it shall be *better*, infinitely *better* with him in *all* : he has now a sure title, he shall hereafter have the possession ; he has now the earnest to support his courage, and raise his expectations, in due time he shall have the full injoyment of his wishes.

4. I observe a special congruity or suitability between the *beatitude*, and the *virtue* or *duty* to which it is promised. Here is the *riches* and *honours* of a kingdom for the *poor in spirit*, or the humble, contented soul ; divine *consolation* for the pious *mourner* ; a *sure possession* of a necessary portion of earthly good things, for those who are *too meek* to strive with ardour and violence about them ; the *satisfactions* of righteousness and goodness for them that *hunger and thirst* after it ; *mercy from God* for those that are *merciful to men* ; the *vision of God* for all those, who by *purity of heart* are qualified for it ; the *title and privileges* of the *children of God*, for all such as have this mark of the *children of God* upon them, *that they love and make peace* ; and finally, *everlasting rest in the kingdom of heaven*, for those who are *persecuted for righteousness sake*, by them that have the chief power and authority in the kingdoms of the earth. And I do not know but it may deserve a remark, that the first and last *beatitude* is the same, viz. *the kingdom of heaven* ;

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ven; perhaps, to signify that all the other *beatitudes* begin and terminate here; begin in the *kingdom of grace*, and terminate in the *kingdom of glory*. And what may we suppose to be our Lord's design in adapting the *beatitude* to the particular *virtue* or *duty* which he would recommend? Partly, that by the variety of the views, under which he represents happiness to us, we might be more allured and affected by it; and partly to show, that there is no christian virtue but carries in it some particular qualification for happiness.—To conclude therefore, let this lovely and glorious scene, which our divine Master has here set before us, awaken our attention, engage our pursuit, and reconcile us to whatever there may be difficult, or ungrateful to flesh and blood, in the practice of any virtue, since the present advantage is so great, and the future reward will be still much greater.





S E R M O N X.

The diversity of conditions among
mankind, the appointment of
Providence.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and the poor meet together;
the Lord is the maker of them
all.*

THE great inequality amongst mankind in regard of their condition and circumstances in the world, has been reckoned by some an *objection* against the divine Providence; since, if there were such a Providence which directed and governed human affairs, they are ready to think there would have been no such wide disproportion between creatures of the same make and original; nor would their common parent have been

been guilty of so much partiality, as to let some of his creatures suffer want, while others have more than heart can wish: this, in their opinion, is hard and unreasonable dealing, and unworthy a wise and good Governour of the world; for which reason they will not believe things to have been ordered as they are by God, but to be the effect of *chance* and *fortune*. A great many who have not gone so far as this, nor do in the least question the Providence of God, because of the unequal distribution of the good things of this life, have yet looked upon it as a *difficulty* in the doctrine of Providence, which they were not able to answer satisfactorily to themselves; while to a multitude of others (indeed to the generality of mankind) this mighty difference of outward condition has been the occasion of many errors and sins; they have been tempted by it to injure one another, and to offend and dishonour God. And yet, after all, if we fairly and soberly consider things, this variety of conditions is easily reconcileable with the notion of a Providence, yea, is a plain argument of the wisdom of Providence, in having so contrived and settled the course of things, as will be afterwards shown.

IT may not be unuseful to prepare the way by a brief explication of the Text. The words *rich* and *poor* are to be understood

stood with some *latitude*. By the *rich* are probably meant, not only those who are commonly so called, or those who flow in wealth, and injoy a superfluous abundance, but persons also of a middle condition, that are in easy circumstances, and able to command the conveniencies of life; these in a larger sense, may be said to be *rich*, and are so in comparison of those who have barely the *necessaries* of life, and these not without the charity of others, or their own toil and labour. As there are several degrees of the *rich*, so of the *poor*, the lowest in one kind not being far removed from the highest in the other. *The rich and the poor meet together.* The meaning is, either that *they meet together in the world*, or in the *intercours*es and *commerce* of life; so the societies on earth are made up of these two sorts of men, of *rich* and *poor*, of base and honourable, of those in a meaner, and those in a better station, who all join to compose one body. Or *the rich and poor meet together*, so as to be upon a *level* as to the main things, in respect of which there is little or no difference between them; as is the *rich*, with regard to the chief and essential advantages of Being and blessings of life, so is the *poor*; and as is the *poor*, with regard to the principal disadvantages and infelicities to which they are subject, so are the *rich*. What does the
rich

rich man (if we speak of those more important things) injoy, which is not also enjoyed by the poor man? Or what does the poor man suffer, to which the rich is not as liable as the poor? *The Lord is the maker of them all.* These words are also capable of a double construction, correspondent to the two-fold sense of the former expression; for if by *the rich and the poor meeting together* be meant their union in society, then the words, *the Lord is the maker of them all*, must be added to signify, that God in his Providence is the author of this difference; he is the maker of the rich as rich, and of the poor as poor; 'tis his will and pleasure, that there should be a diversity in the conditions of men, subordination of some to others, and a disparity in their worldly circumstances. But if by their *meeting together* we understand the equality there is between them, as to the principal inconveniences or advantages of Being, then that *the Lord is the maker of them all*, must import, his being their common creator, their maker, not as rich and poor, but as men; having conferred on them the same rational nature, and consequently intending to deal with them in the *final* dispensation of rewards and punishments, not according to this temporal and external distinction of rich and poor, but the *moral* distinction, as virtuous
or

or vicious, holy or unholy, that shall be found between men at the last day. I shall consider the words in both these senses, and accordingly treat the *two* following Propositions.

I. THE societies of men here below, are by the wise ordination of Providence, made up of rich and poor.

II. SETTING aside the *inequality* there is in the outward circumstances of rich and poor, they are in all other respects upon *equal* terms.

I. THE societies of men here below, are by the wise ordination of Providence, made up of rich and poor. Some societies are more remarkably so, but almost all, whether greater or less, civil or religious, are so in some manner and degree: for though there may be societies, in which none are extremely poor, or very rich, yet the members of such societies, may be denominated rich or poor in a *comparative* sense; being placed in different ranks, according as they are masters or servants, employ others, or are employed by them, have a competent provision of their own to subsist upon, or have not.—In treating this subject I shall

I. PRE-

I. PREMISE a few things for the clearer stating and understanding it.

II. PROVE it to be the will of God, that there should be this distinction of rich and poor in the world.

III. SHEW this to be a righteous and wise appointment of our maker.

I. I SHALL premise a few observations for the clearer stating and understanding of this subject. As to the degree of riches and poverty, it cannot ordinarily be thought the will of God, that men should on the one hand, be exorbitantly rich, or on the other necessitously poor. As to the manner of becoming rich or poor, it makes so considerable a difference in the case, that of some it may be said, *it is not pleasing to God, that they should be what they are.* There are some extraordinary instances wherein the riches and poverty of persons may, in a peculiar manner, be ascribed to the Providence of God. We must not suppose that men are rich or poor by the sole, or immediate agency of divine Providence, but in concurrence with their own actions, and the natural efficacy of *second causes.* And finally, there is reason to think, that had man never fallen, and his posterity had continued pure and uncorrupt, there would have been

no

no instances of *poverty*, properly so called, amongst mankind.

1. As to the degree of riches and poverty, it cannot ordinarily be thought the will of God that men should, on the one hand, be exorbitantly rich, or on the other necessarily poor. Indeed, if wealth flows in upon a very rich man without his seeking for it, God does not expect he should put it away from him, and refuse the blessings which the hand of Providence holds forth to him; all that God expects is, that he make a good use of his *ten thousand talents*, and that as his riches increase, his charity and his good works do the same. But what I intend is, when men who have already more than they know how to manage, are still aiming to get more, *“join house to house, and add field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth. Wo unto such,* saith the Prophet: and that not only when they make use of oppressive methods (as is there intimated) but of those which are innocent; since whatever the methods are, such an insatiable desire of gain, is certainly blameable in itself, and displeasing to God. Those whom God hath blessed with great abundance, should know when it is enough, and

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^a Isai. v. 8,

be ready to say, that *it is enough*; and not be like the grave which continually ^b cries, *give, give*; or like a deep whirl-pool which sucks in all around it; they should bound their desires, give off in time, and leave the pursuit of the world to others. To be always grasping at more of the world, as some are, and never sit down and consider how they may best enjoy what they have, and do most good with it, is an indication of an earthly and sordid temper, which may convince them, that it is not so much by the *blessing* of Providence, as in *judgment* to them, if they are still adding to the overgrown heap. There is something monstrous and out of kind in such *gigantick* greatness; even the Kings of *Israel* are forbidden *greatly to multiply to themselves silver and gold*; and how much less allowable is it for *private* men to do this! There is a *measure* to which persons should stint even their honest industry, and having attained it be content, and thankfully acknowledge the bounties of Providence. We may be still more confident of its not being agreeable to the will of God, that there should be any necessitously poor, since he has sufficiently provided against it, by causing the earth to bring forth more than enough for all its inhabitants. He has, moreover, made it the duty

^b Prov. xxx. 16.^c Deut. xvii. 17.

of as many as can, and do need it, ^d to work with their own hands, and of others to be kind and liberal, and ^e ready to distribute; and were but these two duties well practised, industry by the poor, and charity by the rich, there would be none left to suffer extreme want, and in danger of starving in a land of plenty,

§ 2. THE manner of becoming rich or poor, makes so considerable a difference in the case, that of some it may be truly said, *it is not pleasing to God, they should be what they are.* In some sense we may affirm, they are not among the rich and poor of God's making, having made themselves one or the other by their own sin or folly. ^f *Wo to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbours service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.* There is the gain of unrighteousness, in which the Providence of God has no further interest, than as it justly permits it by way of punishment, either to the person wronged, or to the wrong doer, or to both. If men prosper in their wickedness they must not presently make God a party, or think he approves of their unjust proceedings, because they succeed in them; they ought not to ^g trust in oppression, or become vain in robbery; riches so gotten, are

^d 1 Thes. iv. 11. ^e 1 Tim. vi. 18. ^f Jerem. xxii. 13. ^g Psal. lxii. 10.

are to the hurt of the owner. The Prophet
^a *Habakkuk* having taxed the King of *Ba-
 bylon* for his insatiableness and injustice, for
 his enlarging his desire as bell and as death
 that cannot be satisfied, for gathering in-
 to him all nations, and heaping unto him all
 people; adds, shall not all these take up a pa-
 rable against him and say, wo to him who in-
 creaseth that which is not his; how long? and
 to him that ladeth himself with thick clay.
 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite
 thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and
 thou shalt be for booties unto them? Such
 riches as are the wages of sin; do not so
 properly come from God as from the devil,
 for sin is the work of the devil; he tempts
 men to it, and helps them in contriving and
 effecting their dishonest projects: and this
 may not improbably be one reason why
mammon, which signifies riches in the Syriac
 language, and *μαμωνας*, which signifies the
 same in Greek, grew at length to be the
 names of an invisible Being, who was re-
 presented as the God of riches; i. e. of the
Devil, who is the wicked man's master,
 and the worldling's God. The like may
 be said of those who impoverish themselves
 by their own misconduct, by their idleness
 and negligence, their prodigality, their ex-
 pensive and riotous living, by gaming, or
 R 2 by

by madly venturing their all in hopes of enriching themselves in a more speedy manner; whoever they are that by these and such like courses, fall into poverty, they have none to blame but themselves: God indeed, wisely and justly *permits* it, and this he does with regard to all the wickedness in the world; but though he *permits all evil* (without which permission it could not be done) yet he is the author of none. It is further certain, that God more than *permits* the evils which befall men, considered as the consequences of their evil actions; if men will do those things which are necessarily the causes of such and such effects, he is well pleased that the effects should follow; he has appointed a connection between them, that men might be punished by their own hands; this, however, is no manner of excuse for them, their own sins are the root of their sufferings. ⁱ *Solomon* therefore, observes of *sloth*, of *drunkenness*, and *company-keeping*, that they commonly bring men to *poverty*: it can be little consolation to such that God approves their condition, since he only approves it as a chastisement of their folly.

3. THERE are some extraordinary instances of persons whose *riches* or *poverty* may, in a peculiar manner, be ascribed to the
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ⁱ Prov. vi. 11.—xii. 21.—xxviii. 19.

Providence of God; the hand of God is more visible in lifting them up or throwing them down, many times to others, or if not to others, yet to themselves. We see those who have riches thrown in upon them unexpectedly, they are surpris'd into wealth, it comes to them at a time when they look'd not for it, and by ways which they could have least imagin'd; or there is a strange concurrence of causes, or a divine blessing which signally attends them. The world will furnish us with many instances of this kind, as the sacred history does with some. Thus were the Patriarchs *Abraham, Isaac,* and *Jacob*, notwithstanding their unsettled condition, and that they were but sojourners in a strange land, wonderfully prospered by God in their outward affairs, insomuch that the princes and great men of that time took notice of it, and for this reason courted their friendship and alliance. They who were *aliens from the covenant of promise* could observe, ^k *that God was with them in all that they did.* When promises of a temporal nature were more common (as they were under the Old Testament) such examples were the same. One of the chief rewards annexed to obedience by the law of *Moses*, was worldly prosperity; and doubtless, when this promise was so often repeated, and so

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^k Gen. xxi. 22. xxvi. 28.

much insisted upon, to the end that men might be incouraged by it, their prosperity did more plainly appear to be the result of a special Providence; not that even then they could from hence infer the *special favour* of God, for this *always* and *only* followed *real integrity* and *vital religion*; whereas the blessings of Providence, like the rain of heaven, descended upon the just and upon the unjust, and at most were designed only as the rewards of external and national obedience: and much less may persons now build any such conclusion upon their earthly riches, how remarkable soever the Providence of God may be in the *manner* of bestowing them. If *love* and *hatred* were not to be *known* in *Solomon's* days by these things, as he tells us they were not, I am sure they are farther from being discernable by these marks under the *gospel* dispensation, which makes use of more exalted motives to piety and goodness, taken not so much from temporal as from spiritual good things, not from ^m *things seen* and present, but *unseen* and future. There are others, in whose *poverty* there is something as *observable* as in the *riches* of the former. They who *lived deliciously*, and were ready to think they should *see no sorrow*, find themselves sadly and suddenly disappointed; the

† Eccles. ix. 1.

m 2 Cor. iv. 18.

the scene changes, and *their plagues come upon them in one day*: the suddenness of their ruin is oftentimes surprising, or if not that, yet the way in which it is effected; men are sometimes made poor they know not how; the less there is to be seen of means and instruments, the more reason have they to eye the disposing hand of God.

4. WE must not suppose that men are made rich or poor by the sole or immediate agency of divine Providence, but in concurrence with their own actions, and the natural efficacy of *second* causes. 'Tis agreeable to the wisdom of God, to effect his designs by suitable means, and it is his usual way, even where those means are most unperceivable. ^a *The blessing of the Lord maketh rich*. But how? Not in a miraculous way, as *Elijah* was fed by the *ravens*, and the *loaves* were multiplied by our Saviour; but in a course of *honest industry*; and therefore, the *wise man* tells us, that *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*; nor does he think this to be any contradiction to the other, since he mentioned both in the same chapter, looking upon them as joint causes in the production of the same effect. Providence is, indeed, the supreme cause, but in saying that it is supreme, we suppose that there are other causes subordinate to it, and governed by it. In the way which *Jacob*

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took

^a Prov. x. 4, 22.

took to increase his flocks, though there was a great deal produced beyond the natural force of the means made use of, which caused him to say, *° God had taken away the cattle of Laban, and had given them unto him*; yet there was some art too on his side, in *ᵑ laying the rods which he had pilled in the watering troughs before the flocks when they came to drink*, in order to work upon their imaginations at the time of conceiving. This much at least, we are taught from this history, that if men intend to succeed in their worldly business, they must put in practice the most likely methods, and then commit the event to Providence, expecting the blessing of God no otherwise than in conjunction with their own prudence and diligence. And thus again, when God is pleased to strip men bare of the good things of this world, he does it by crossing their designs, blasting their enjoyments, (which in *scripture* is called blowing on them; *ᵑ ye looked for much and lo it came to little, and when ye brought it home I did blow upon it*) or by giving the devil leave by his instruments, to vent his malice upon them, as he did in the case of *Job*. The Providence of God then in appointing men their several conditions, does ordinarily proceed according to

ᵑ Gen. xxxi. 9. *ᵑ* Gen. xxx. 37, 38. *ᵑ* Hagg. i. 9.

to the natural course of things, leaving them to produce the effects to which they are respectively adapted.

5. HAD man never fallen, and his posterity continued pure and uncorrupt, we have reason to think there would have been no instances of *poverty*, properly so called, among mankind. 'Tis not improbable that even upon this supposition men would have been distinguished into several ranks and degrees, of high and low, governours and governed, men in more honourable stations and callings, and in less honourable; the nature of human society in this animal state, seems to require such distinctions as these; but still the meanest would have been above contempt, he who had least would have had enough, he who did not abound would have lacked nothing. *Innocence* must needs have been a stranger to every thing that had the face of *misery*. The *earth* not being *curst*, would have brought forth all things useful to life in greater abundance; men would have known how to make their advantage of every opportunity, of promoting their temporal as well as spiritual welfare; neither would there have been the least inclination in mankind to over-reach and defraud one another, but on the contrary, they would have been mutually helpful and beneficial. And besides all this, the Provi-

Providence of God would have watched to guard them against pernicious accidents, and have conducted them by the hand in the road to contentment and happiness; there would have been no *want*, because there would have been no *sin*; every man would have been easy and happy in the condition allotted him, and have contributed all that in him lay to the happiness of the society; than which state of innocence and peace upon earth, nothing can be conceived more compleatly blessed, but that state of perfection and felicity which is reserved for the saints in heaven. *Poverty* is the consequence of the *fall*; and considering men as *fallen*, 'tis the ordination of Providence, that the societies of the world should be composed of rich and poor; for that *the Lord is the maker of them both*, is the business of the next head to show. Therefore

II. I shall next endeavour to prove it to be the will of God, that there should be this distinction of *rich* and *poor* in the world. Religion teaches us to ascribe all events to the Providence of God, which interposes in human affairs, and directs and orders the whole scene. *Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the judge; he putteth down one*

one and setteth up another. He humbleth himself to behold the things which are done in the earth; raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the needy out of the dunghil; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. And speaking by the Prophet, *I, saith he, am the Lord, and there is none else, I cause the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.* Creatures are but the instruments of Providence, which he imployes as he thinks fit, and according to the design which he is carrying on, *for the counsel of the Lord shall stand forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* This superintendency and interposition of divine Providence in and over all affairs is emblematically represented in Jacob's vision, of which you have an account Genes. xxviii. 12, 13. *And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father. Understanding by this ladder the Providence of God, by the stairs of it, 'tis obvious to suppose the degrees and orders of second causes are signified, as by the angels ascending and descending we are put in mind of the ministry*

I Isai xlv. 7.

I Ps. xxxiii 11.

nistry which they perform under Providence; in that the *ladder* is said to *reach from earth to heaven*, what does this imply, but the *universality* of God's Providence equally extending to things in heaven and things on the earth? And when 'tis added, that *behold, the Lord stood above it*, the meaning is, that God is the *first cause* and *last end* of all, who inspects and governs the whole world, and *does all things according to the counsel of his own will*. So that we cannot doubt if we embrace the *scripture* notion of Providence, that the *diversity* of mens circumstances is ordered by God. If we desire to have the same thing more *expressly* affirmed, there are several passages which speak directly to this purpose; I shall cite two or three. * *The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, he bringeth low and lifteth up. Both riches and honour cometh of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thy hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.* So in *Eccles. v. 19.* 'tis manifestly supposed, that whoever has riches 'tis God bestows them, *every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth*; and 'tis foretold *Deut. xv. 11.* *that the poor should never cease out of the land.* Or if we leave *scripture* evidence, and only argue from the
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* *Ephes. i. 11.* * *1 Sam. ii. 7.* * *1 Chr. xxix. 12.*

nature of things and the present state of the world, we may be certain that God approves and has ordained this distinction between men, of *rich* and *poor*. It cannot be doubted that in settling things as he has done, God intended that there should be distinct properties, or a division of things, so that men might have their several claims or titles, one man to this thing, another to that, one to more, and another to less; and likewise a right to manage and dispose of what they possess in such manner as they pleased, within certain limitations and restrictions. When God gave the land of *Canaan* to the children of *Israel*, it was not only as a *common inheritance*, but to be divided by lot, every *tribe* having its peculiar portion, and so every *family*, which was greater or smaller, according to the number of the *tribe* or *family*. In like manner as men multiplied upon the earth, they proceeded very soon to make a distribution of it, most probably by *common consent*, and this not without the approbation of Providence, as we may fairly conclude from a like establishment of things in the land of *Promise*. That there would have been a *greater community of goods* among mankind had *sin* never come into the world, I am verily persuaded; but yet I believe not an *absolute community* neither, exclusive of separate

parate possessions and titles. 'Tis plain the world at present would not admit of such a *community*, and they must be void of common sense who would attempt to introduce it. Now if things are settled so, that persons have their respective rights and properties, it cannot be helped but in the course of time great alterations will happen, property will be shifted and transferred from one hand to another, insomuch that whereas at the first division there was no man but had his share, it must come at length to be much otherwise; some by their *idleness* and *extravagance* diminishing their part, others by their *care* and *labour* adding to it: they who are born into the world in following ages finding it all taken up, must consequently be shut out, unless it happens to descend to them by inheritance. Further, considering the *different multiplication* of mankind, some families growing exceeding numerous, while others have a very small increase, or stand at a stay; however equal the *primitive* distribution might be, a great inequality must in a few years be occasioned by this unequal increase; that which was abundantly sufficient for the *parents* of the family, bearing but a small proportion to the wants of a *large posterity*. From what has been offered, it appears impossible for an equality to be long preserved in the present

present course of the world, which, among many other things, shews the great *absurdity* of the *levelling* principles: for were men to act upon these principles, there must be a *new distribution* every age; nay, once an age would hardly serve, since it is to be feared, that long enough before this time was expired, what by gifts, by sales, by different expences, and division of inheritances, the world would be pretty full stocked with indigent persons, who would be ready to envy their wealthier neighbours, and to clamour for another division.

YET further, as a *variety* of professions and callings are necessary, and society cannot subsist without *trade* and *commerce*, it must be highly agreeable to reason, and because to reason, to the will of God also, the author and giver of reason, that men should negotiate together, and in some way or other, serve the publick, and get a livelihood for themselves. And what must follow from hence? The very same inequality of conditions as before: for besides, that trades and employments are not all alike gainful, and yet there is a necessity of all, agreeably to which necessity, persons are by their different circumstances or genius, and inclination determined, some to one way of life, some to another; besides this, we may observe, that in the same business estates are both gotten and lost; all men have neither the same capacities or opportunities
which

which some have, and how shall we account for this difference but by the will of God, *"who gives to every man severally as he will?"* Men may say in their hearts, *"my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth;"* but in reality it is *God who giveth them power to get wealth.* If one man has greater abilities for business than another, a greater reach and sagacity, more judgment and fore-sight, who but God indowed him with them? If he is better situated, and meet with more success, he ought to consider that Providence placed him so advantageously, and makes him to prosper. According as God in his Providence smiles or frowns, blesses or curses, lends or denies his assistance, men advance or decline in their worldly affairs, are rich or become poor. The great instrument of wealth is *trade*, but God has not given to every man the knowledge how to manage this instrument; every man has not the proper turn of mind for business or understanding the arts of gain, as neither does God see fit to bless and prosper every man; hence comes that variety of success and disappointment, of gains and losses which occasions a like variety of *rich and poor*; the *reconcilableness* of which, with the justice and wisdom of God, I shall shew in my next Discourse.

1 Cor. xii. 11.

Deut. viii. 17, 18.



S E R M O N XI.

The righteousness and wisdom of
God in the diversity of conditions
among mankind, and the Duties
of the rich.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and the poor meet together;
the Lord is the maker of them
all.*

IN a former Discourse I observed, that each of the sentences in the Text admitted of a double interpretation; for by the *rich and the poor meeting together*, may be meant, either that they *meet together in the world*, or in the *intercourses and commerce of life*; or that they are upon a *level* as to the main things. Correspondent to this *two-fold* sense of the *first* sentence, the *last*, that God

is the maker of them all, may signify, either his being the maker of the rich as rich, and of the poor as poor; or his being their common creator as men, having conferred on them the same rational nature, and consequently to reward or punish them at last, not according to their different ranks and conditions, but their different moral conduct. On these two different interpretations I founded two Propositions, which I proposed to treat distinctly.

I. THE societies of men here below, are by the wise ordination of Providence, made up of rich and poor. In discoursing on this, I

I. PREMISED several observations for the clearer stating and understanding it; viz.—as to the degree of riches and poverty, it cannot ordinarily be thought the will of God, that men should on the one hand, be exorbitantly rich, or on the other necessitously poor—as to the manner of becoming rich or poor, it makes so considerable a difference in the case, that of some it may be said, *it is not pleasing to God, that they should be what they are*—there are some extraordinary instances wherein the riches or poverty of persons may, in a peculiar manner, be ascribed to the Providence of God—we must

must not suppose that men are *rich* or *poor* by the sole or immediate agency of divine Providence, but in concurrence with their own actions, and the natural efficacy of *second* causes—and finally, there is reason to think, that had man never fallen, and his posterity had continued uncorrupt, there would have been no instances of *poverty* properly so called, amongst mankind.—Having premised these observations, I

2. PROVED it from *scripture* and *reason*, to be the will of God that there should be this distinction of *rich* and *poor* in the world. And in prosecution of the method proposed, I am now

3. To shew that this is a righteous and wise appointment of our maker; or that this *inequality* in mens outward circumstances has nothing in it inconsistent with the justice of God, and is a great argument of his wisdom.

1. THAT in this dispensation of Providence, there is nothing repugnant to justice, will not need many words to evince. ^a *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and all that dwell therein. All that is in the heaven and in the earth is his; he is the most high possessor of all, and may certainly* ^b *do with his own what he will, being a debtor to no man, and therefore accountable*

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to

^a Psal. xxiv. 1, 2. ¹ Chr. xxix. 11. ^b Mat. xx. 15.

to no man. If it be his pleasure to give to this man *ten* talents, and to another but *one*, who shall presume to ask him, what dost thou? In this unequal distribution he does thee no wrong. When *Joseph*, as Governour of *Egypt*, made an entertainment for his brethren, before he had yet discovered himself to them, and according to the custom of that country, sent messes to every one of them from off his own table; though *Benjamin's* mess was *five* times as much as any of theirs, yet however strange and unaccountable this might appear to them, they could not think it a just ground of complaint, since the master of the feast was at liberty to dispense his favours as he pleased. They who have the best conceit of themselves will not pretend to challenge any thing at the hand of God as their due; were they *innocent*, they could not do it, and much less can they do it as *sinful* creatures; in which condition justice owes them nothing, but they, and all they have, are a debt to justice; and how then is God unrighteous? They may be ready to think in this, that when mankind are all of them *equally* undeserving, God should single out some of them as the objects of his Providential bounty, while he leaves others to struggle with want and poverty; this, in their

judg-

Gen. xliii; 34.

judgment, may look like *partiality* and *respect* of persons; whereas, it ought to be remarked that goodness is free, and as long as no injury is done me in with-holding a benefit to which I have no claim; this, which is no injury in itself, cannot become one by a person's bestowing that upon another which he with-held from me. And that which clears divine Providence of all *partiality* in this affair is—that though these earthly enjoynments are good in themselves, and to be acknowledged as favours and mercies, yet they are not among the *best things* nor the *principal blessings* which God has to bestow, in conferring which he proceeds by other rules—that our interest in the divine favour is not to be judged of by these things—and that finally, there are wise reasons why this *inequality* should take place in the present life. This leads me to show

2. THAT as this *diversity* in mens outward circumstances is not inconsistent with the justice of God, so it is a manifest proof of his wisdom in the government of the world, and disposal of men and things. To be convinced of this, consider

1. THAT by this means the order of society is better maintained, and the wants of it better supplied. 'Tis fit that there should be a regular subordination of the members of a community, that they may

be all serviceable to the publick interest, and in their several degrees and conditions promote it, which they could not, or they would not do, if none were poor, or if all were so. The common-wealth needs some to advise and counsel, others to apply themselves to the liberal arts and sciences, others to carry on commerce, others to work with their hands in cultivating the earth, or performing the more laborious and drudging part of business. Now on supposition, all were in mean and narrow circumstances, who would be at leisure to attend upon the publick, or pursue the improvements of knowledge? Or on the other hand, if all were rich and well provided for, how few would care to meddle with the servile offices of life. These, for want of hands, must lie neglected, or be very badly performed; there would be perpetual contentions about the work of the field and of the house, every one willing to do as little as he could; and by that means leaving a great deal undone which was necessary to procure the conveniencies of living: whereas now that the conditions of men are so various, many are obliged to *earn their bread in the sweat of their brows*; and not a few are at liberty to follow the bent of their genius in other occupations, which imploy the mind or body or both; and though, perhaps, not altogether

altogether so slavish as the first sort, are yet a weariness to the flesh. The rich have the service and labours of the poor, the poor are paid and protected by the rich. ^a *The profit of the earth is for all, the king himself is served by the field.* 'Tis here as in the parts of a well-contrived building, some may be higher, others lower, some designed for nobler uses, others for those of less dignity, but all are requisite in their places, and all conspire to compleat the beauty and commodiousness of the whole. ^a *So the body is not one member but many, and God has set the members every one of them in the body as it has pleased him. They are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are yet necessary; and those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; that there should be no schism in the body.* This similitude the Apostle pursues at large in describing the harmony which there is, or ought to be in the christian church, arising from the diversity of gifts and offices joined with their subserviency to each other, and to the common good; and

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^a Eccles. v. 9.^a 1 Cor. xii. 14, &c.

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the same bears a very easy application to civil
society.

2. THIS *inequality* is a standing conviction or argument of the vanity of the world, and its little worth and importance, that these are not the things to be chiefly regarded, that the happiness of man is of a higher nature, and lies not in this life, or in the things of it; for then we should at least see a kind of *equality* observed by Providence in adjusting this *inequality*. My meaning is, that there would be a regular though not an equal distribution of these outward blessings, so that they should have most who were most worthy, the most virtuous should be the most prosperous, they who had a less degree of virtue and piety, should have a proportionably less increase of wealth, and none but the wicked of the earth should suffer want: whereas we know by a thousand and ten thousand instances, that no such method is followed, '*but all things come alike to all*, as if *chance* and not Providence governed them. Among those who fear God, both *poor* and *rich* are to be found; and so among those who live without God in the world; virtue and religion bring with them very little advantage as to these outward things; but rather, if there be any difference, those who pay least regard
to

' Eccles. ix. 2.

to religion carry away most of the world. And for what reason does God suffer this? Why hath he established such a course and order of things, that commonly speaking, it is no advantage as to worldly wealth, for a person to be a sincere and devout worshipper of God; he may, notwithstanding this, be liable to streights? One reason of this seems to be, that men might not be tempted to take up with this as their final state, but might be led by the present œconomy and scene of things to the thoughts and belief of another state, wherein rewards shall be dispensed of a different kind, and in a very different manner. The promiscuous events of this life, and wide difference in the circumstances of persons, without a suitable difference in their tempers and characters, naturally suggest a life to come, and future recompences; and certainly this is a very valuable end or design of Providence which is served by the distinction of *rich* and *poor*, which does now indifferently obtain among men of every character whether good or bad. It may convince us, that this world is not our home or happiness, and that all the enjoyments of time and sense are of no value in comparison of the felicity to be enjoyed in another life. And since the *inequality* of things instructs us in this important truth, we have cause to adore the
goodness

goodness as well as wisdom of God in the
 methods of his Providence. " Yes, I am
 " satisfied that the world is wisely governed
 " even from this very instance, which some
 " inconsiderate people account a mighty
 " objection against the wisdom of Provi-
 " dence. I am no way unsettled to see
 " Providence treat those so very differently,
 " whom nature placed upon a level. To see
 " mankind, who are all children of the same
 " Father, have some of them more than
 " they know how to enjoy, others hardly
 " necessaries; to see *Lazarus* clothed in
 " rags, and the *Rich Man* in purple and fine
 " linnen; when I reflect on this I learn this
 " useful lesson, that I am to look above
 " this world, and to prepare for a better
 " state, which Providence plainly points out
 " to me. I must now either disown a
 " Providence or believe a future state;
 " for if there be a Providence, and this
 " Providence be wise and holy, as it must
 " be both, if it be the Providence of an in-
 " finitely wise and holy God, I am sure
 " that affairs would not have been ordered
 " as they are, but upon supposition of a
 " world to come: and that we might be
 " induced to believe that there is such a
 " world, and be more solicitous about it,
 " is the reason that affairs are thus ordered.
 " Blessed be God who thus calls off my
 mind

“ mind from these transitory things; * *the*
 “ *fashion of this world passeth away*; but
 “ when this passes, another scene succeeds,
 “ which is not a *fashion* or *shadow* as this,
 “ but real, substantial and permanent: here
 “ men appear in different qualities and cha-
 “ racters, as 'tis proper they should, because
 “ this is a state of trial and no more.”—
 This minds me of another consideration,

3. THE present *inequality* amongst man-
 kind gives them an opportunity for the trial,
 the exercise, the display of several virtues,
 suitable to the condition of life they are in.
 As there are virtues peculiarly belonging to
 a prosperous, or adverse and afflicted condi-
 tion, so there are some virtues which adorn
 riches, and others which make poverty itself
 appear lovely and agreeable. What these
 virtues are I shall distinctly shew in the *Ap-
 plication*. The circumstances which persons
 are under, may be considered as methods of
 trial by which God proves them, and dis-
 covers to themselves and to the world what
 is in their hearts; and as the objects and oc-
 casions of one or more christian graces,
 which shining brightly in the eyes of the
 world, will serve for a demonstration of the
 excellency of religion, and *be found unto*
praise and honour and glory at the coming of
their Lord. And were but the behaviour of
 persons

persons professing the gospel such as that gospel recommends, and their condition requires; did they *know to abound and how to suffer want*, religion would hardly need any other advocate or argument than such examples. But alas, riches and poverty do oftner furnish us with instances of mens vicious than virtuous dispositions and inclinations, and at the same time that they betray, are seen to increase them too! But this is their fault who pervert the design of God's Providential dispensations towards them; these things are intended and fitted to answer a good end, and do so upon those whose minds are rightly tempered, by presenting them with opportunities of *glorifying God, and shewing forth the virtues of him who has called them into his marvellous light*; and upon all, by giving them the knowledge of themselves. And as a further evidence of the wisdom of Providence herein, we see the same men placed in contrary circumstances, and changing conditions with those above or below them; that they might have room to practise the virtues of the most opposite states; or that having been sufficiently known in a former condition, trial may be made whether they will do better or worse in a new one. And I make no question

Phil. iv. 12.
Deut. viii. 2.

John xxi. 19. 1 Pet ii. 9.

question, that men are sometimes stript of their wealth because they do not make a right use of it; and to see whether an alteration in their outward affairs may produce an alteration in their thoughts and demeanour. It is in this world as on a hill, where some are going up and others coming down; the consequence of which must be, that the *rich and the poor* will frequently *meet together* in this sense too, *i. e.* the *rich* who are falling, will meet the *poor* who are rising, and each take the other's place. These revolutions are common in the world, and in passing from one condition of life to another men do necessarily meet upon the way. It were happy if they would answer the design of God in this diversity of circumstances, and study a behaviour correspondent thereto. The *Application* of this point, to which I proceed, will further illustrate the wisdom of God in this *diversity* of conditions.

AND here I must remind you of what was observed in the entrance to this subject; that the terms *rich* and *poor* are to be understood with some *latitude*, so as not to comprehend those only who are in the *extremes* of either condition, but all such likewise as in a *comparative* sense, or in respect of each other may be said to be *rich* or *poor*; according to which larger acceptation of the words,

words, there are persons of both sorts in every society and congregation, that is, some who are in more plentiful, others who are in straiter circumstances; some who have but little if any thing more than they earn by their daily labour, and others who have goods laid up for future time. I shall *Apply* what has been said to both these.

I. To them who are *rich*, at least in comparison of many whom they see below them. They should acknowledge God *who giveth them richly all things to enjoy*—they should avoid a *proud and contemptuous* behaviour towards their inferiours—and should be kind, charitable and beneficent to all who are in want and distress.

2. **THE** *rich* should not be backward to acknowledge in a thankful and religious manner the good Providence of God, which *giveth them richly all things to enjoy*. This *religious acknowledgment of God* in the enjoyment of riches stands opposed to these *three* vices, which are all too common—to a wicked custom of ascribing our wealth and prosperity to any thing, rather than to the Providence of God—to an intemperate, a sensual, and ungodly course of life—and to a sordid, niggardly temper in what regards the expensive part of religion.

I. A

1 Tim. vi. 17.

I. *A religious acknowledgment of God,* in the enjoyment of riches, stands opposite to that wicked custom into which a great many have fallen, of ascribing their wealth and prosperity to any thing, rather than to the directing Providence of God. The kindness and assistance of others, or their own good management, or *chance* itself, shall have the name of it, and not the *blessing of God* : 'twas good luck, or they may thank such a friend, who, tho' he was but the instrument of Providence, shall carry away all the praise ; while God is forgotten, or little esteemed. But they are especially fond of being thought the framers of their own fortune, glad when they can say, ^k *Is not this great Babylon, which I have raised by the might of my power ?* 'Tis with them, as with the Prince of Tyre, whom God by the Prophet upbraids with the proud and swelling thoughts of himself. ^l *Thy heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a god ; yet thou art a man, and not God, tho' thou hast set thine heart, as the heart of God. Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel ; there is no secret that they can hide from thee ; with thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches : by thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thy heart*

^k Dan. iv. 30. ^l Ezek. xxviii. 2—5.

heart is lifted up because of thy riches. There is a kind of *atheism* in disregarding God as the giver of riches and power, and when we take the honour of these things to ourselves, and make our boast of them, we do as it were usurp the seat of God. There is too much need of that caution, ^m *let not the rich man glory in his riches*, for nothing is more natural; and therefore ⁿ *Agur* wisely made it his request, that *God would not give him riches*, adding this reason for it, *least I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?* There may be such a Being as God, and do what I can, I find myself inclined to believe that there is; but what of this? Is it *he* that hath made me rich, or I myself? Yes man, *be* it is that hath made the difference between thee and thy poor neighbour; thou hast nothing but what thou hast received, and why then shouldest thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Do thy riches appear the natural fruits of thy skill and diligence? But did not God give, and does not he preserve to thee that sagacity and vigour, which qualified thee with success to pursue wealth, and has not his *secret blessing* ascertained thy success? Dost thou owe thy wealth to thy birth, or the favourable situation wherein thou art placed? And was it not God who ordered thee to be born in these circumstances

^m Jerem. ix. 23.ⁿ Prov. xxx. 8.

stances, when he might have appointed thy birth of parents, from whom thy only inheritance would have been *want* and *labour*? Have the favour and friendship of others enriched thee? But was it not God, who, in the course of his Providence, cast thee in the way of their favour? Is not he the author of their benevolent and generous dispositions? And, after all, what would their favour have availed thee, without the Providence of God preserving thy life and reason, and thy abilities for improving their favour, or for enjoying wealth? Gratefully therefore own the hand which feeds thee, be thankful to God thy chief benefactor, and serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things; which leads my thoughts to the *second* particular.

2. *A religious acknowledgment of God*, in the enjoyment of riches, stands opposed to an intemperate, a sensual, and ungodly course of life. There is a *practical acknowledgment* of the favours of Providence, as to which 'tis sad to consider, that they who are under the greatest obligations should do least, and having received from God more than others, dishonour him more. Riches, being the gift of God, should be a prevailing argument of dutifulness and obedience to the giver, instead of which, they are apt

to corrupt the mind, and, like a rank soil, to produce a large crop of weeds, that is, of sins and vices, such as luxury and excess, pride, injustice, and irreligion. For this cause *Moses* tells the people of *Israel*,
 * *when thou hast eaten, and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day; lest when thou hast eaten, and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; that then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, who fed thee in the wilderness. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; that is, remember him so, as to fear him and keep his commandments. And very reasonable it is, that we should thus remember God in our prosperous state, because it is he who giveth us power to get wealth. Men must not imagine, if they have this world's goods, that they have therefore a licence to be slothful and sensual, to give themselves up to fleshly indulgencies, to pamper their bodies, and spend their time in carnal mirth and pleasure, and much less to cast off the fear of God, and live in contempt*

* Deut. viii. 10.—

contempt and defiance of their maker ; this indeed is too often the case, but thus it ought not to be. 'Tis a most unpardonable abuse of riches, to be on account of these more forgetful and regardless of God ; 'tis as if they, who are most highly favoured by a government, should be the greatest enemies to it ; or as if a person should affront and injure his benefactor, in the same proportion as he hath been obliged to him. Their estate may be sufficient to support their way of living, but that is not the question ; 'tis whether their way of living be warranted by reason and religion. If it be not, the abundance which God has given them, instead of excusing, does but aggravate their intemperance and ungodliness *. If it be a good way of judging of mens thoughts by their actions, the *rich* (I speak of the greater part of them) seem to have a fancy, that *religion* does not suit their circumstances, particularly the more self-denying duties of it, which they therefore

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leave

* A *heathen* Poet would teach such better, *Horat.*
L. 2. S. 2. v. 100, &c.

—*Ego vestigalia magna*—

“ If thou hast such a superfluity of wealth, is there
 “ no way of bestowing it better ? Why should a
 “ worthy person want, when thou art able to relieve
 “ him ? Why should the publick temples go to ruin ?
 “ Why out of so overgrown a heap can thy *country*
 “ have nothing ?”

leave to be practised by persons in a meaner condition. But will such a fancy as this bear to be examined? Is it not the most absurd and irrational? Have not *rich* men the greatest reason to be *good* men? Should not every temporal mercy be an additional motive to the performance of our duty to our great benefactor?

3. *This religious acknowledgment of God*, in the enjoyment of riches, stands opposed to a sordid, niggardly temper in what regards the honour of God, and the interest of religion. How can it be justified to conscience, when men have received all from God, to with-hold all from him? Or to devote but little out of a great deal? Whatever they consecrate to *pious* uses, they should consider, that those words of *David*, (speaking of the offerings which had been made by himself and the people of *Israel* towards building the Temple) may be applied to them; *all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*: so that really there would be no proper *merit* in it, if we should contribute never so liberally on such occasions; but we are guilty of the most shameful *ingratitude*, as often as we deny our assistance to such good works. It is not only a command of *scripture*, but a dictate of common *reason*, *honour the Lord with thy*

^p 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

^q Prov. iii. 9.

thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase. And accordingly as the law required these *first fruits*, so it was a general custom in the most antient times for men to make their *offerings* on the *altars* of their Gods, and in case of *victory* to dedicate part of the spoils to them, in token of their having obtained success by the divine aid and blessing, and as a memorial of their gratitude. Indeed, as to the *particular part* of our substance which we should give to God and religion, the *gospel* does not fix it, as neither is it possible exactly to ascertain it by *reason*. It is in general made our duty to *sanctify the whole* by setting aside a *part*, while the proportioning *that part* is left to our own conscience and discretion, that there might be room for the exercise of an ingenuous piety, and what we do of this kind might appear to be voluntary, *for God loveth a free and chearful giver.* It is strange how some, whose abilities are very considerable, can satisfy themselves with doing no more for the support of a *gospel-ministry*, or the carrying on of a *good design*. Do they believe that God has given them all that they possess? And that they are but *stewards*, intrusted with the management of it for his interest and glory? Either they do not believe this, or do not duly consider it;

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this

this is the most charitable construction which the matter will bear, since we cannot suppose that they are persuaded of this truth and make their reflections upon it, without accusing them of the most detestable injustice in appropriating what is not their own, or the most stupid folly in not perceiving the obligations they are under to act otherwise. This is the *first* inference, that since God maketh men rich, they should not be backward to acknowledge after a thankful and religious manner his good Providence herein.

2. SINCE Providence has made this distinction between *rich* and *poor*, the *rich* should carefully avoid a proud and contemptuous behaviour towards the *poor*. The *Wise Man*, and one of the richest Princes observes, that *he who is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour*; which is as much as to say, that no one else will do it. *Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any*; and who art thou that thou shouldest despise thy fellow-creature? Thou forgettest surely that thou art naturally as indigent and destitute as he, and that in despising the *poor* man thou reflectest on the wisdom of Providence which has made him so. *Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his maker*. In truth, thou dost not consider that God is the author of this difference between thee
and

and him; for why then shouldest thou swell upon it, and carry it as if this outward difference was the foundation of an inward and real difference between you? Whereas in truth, a man is neither better nor worse for his *riches* or *poverty*; the person is not ennobled by his condition; wealth bestows not either wisdom or merit; the vile and worthless person is the *same* in whatever state you place him. The Apostle *Paul*, in his instructions to *Timothy*, directs him "to charge those who were rich in the world, not to be high-minded. There will always be need of this caution, when it is so natural for men to value themselves upon their worldly possessions, and to measure their own worth and that of other men by this standard. Pride is the worm which is bred out of riches, and this pride within will almost unavoidably produce an unsuitable demeanour towards the inferior part of mankind. Nothing wins more than affability and condescension, they are most popular qualities which conciliate the favour and good-will of others, and at the same time are no more than what the greatest owe to the meanest. The *rich*, out of mere humanity, should converse in a friendly and familiar manner with the *poor*; poverty of itself is grievous enough, persons should not

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there-

therefore increase the uneasiness by a haughty insolent carriage, they should rather endeavour to reconcile the *poor* man to his condition, by convincing him that his poverty does not make him *contemptible*. It is the observation of the * *Satyr*ist,

*Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,
Quàm quod ridiculos homines facit ;—*

“ That there is no disadvantage attending
“ unhappy poverty harder to be borne, than
“ that ridicule and contempt, to which it
“ exposes men.” I shall add, that there
is nothing more *unjust* and *inhuman* ; 'tis
unjust to treat those with contempt whom
God has seated beneath us for this reason,
that we are indebted to Providence for this
superiority we have above them ; and it is
inhuman, because we hereby add affliction
to the afflicted, there being nothing human
nature can worse bear than *contempt*.

3. IT is the duty of the *rich* to be charitable and beneficent to the *poor*, a duty manifestly resulting from the consideration we are now upon. Hath God given thee riches, and with-held them from thy *poor* neighbour, and needest thou be told why he hath done this ? Not because thou art more deserving than he, but among other reasons

* *Juv*, *Sat*, iii. v. 152.

reasons, that thou mightest open thy heart and thy hand to those in distress; God would relieve them by thy means, and in intrusting thee with these goods, designed that thou shouldest disperse them among the needy. *Timothy* was to charge the rich to be good, * to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willingly to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they might lay hold on eternal life. And really he alone is truly rich who is rich in good works, † he is rich towards God, his are ‡ durable riches and righteousness. The scripture abounds with exhortations and motives to charity, there is hardly any one thing more prest than this, or more sharply condemned than covetousness and uncharitableness; the doom of such we learn from the doom of the *Rich Man* in the † parable, who for his hard-heartedness in not feeding hungry *Lazarus*, with the crumbs which fell from his table, is (O righteous sentence) denied a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. And if they who barely with-hold from the poor, when it is in the power of their hands to give, must expect this return, can they who oppress and tyrannize over them look for more favourable treatment? Let such read the *fifth* chapter of the Epistle

* 1 Tim. vi. 18.
viii. 18.

† Luke xii. 21.

‡ Luke xvi. 19.

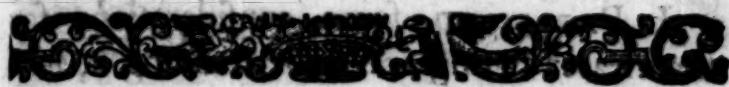
§ Prov.

Epistle of St. James, where they will see what is like to be the condition of such persons. It is more immediately to our purpose what Solomon observes, that *he who oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his maker; but he that honours him has mercy on the poor.* By unmercifulness and extortion, we peculiarly reproach the supreme disposer, for having furnished one man with the means and ability of injuring and domineering over another, and leaving the other without defence against his insults. : on the contrary, the merciful man honoureth his maker, and he who honours his maker, will be merciful; he will call to mind from whom he has received all, and for what end it was given him, and by answering this end, he justifies the Providence of God in ordering things as it has done.

As to the *poor*, since God has appointed their condition, it is their duty to be contented and satisfied in it, and to frame themselves and their behaviour agreeable thereto, as I shall show in the next Discourse.

† Prov. xiv. 31.

S E R-



S E R M O N XII.

The Duties of the poor, and their
Equality with the rich in the most
important things.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and the poor meet together;
the Lord is the maker of them
all.*

I PROPOSED to treat *two* observations
grounded on the Text, and have almost
gone through the

I. THE societies of men here below, are
by the wise ordination of Providence made
up of rich and poor. In discoursing on
this I

I. PRE-

I. PREMISED some considerations for the clearer stating and understanding it, *viz.*—as to the degree of riches and poverty it cannot ordinarily be thought the will of God, that men should on the one hand be exorbitantly rich, or on the other necessarily poor—as to the manner of becoming rich and poor, it makes so considerable a difference in the case, that of some it may be said it is *not pleasing to God, that they should be what they are*—there are some extraordinary instances wherein the riches or poverty of persons may in a peculiar manner be ascribed to the Providence of God—we must not suppose that men are rich or poor by the sole or immediate agency of divine Providence, but in concurrence with their own actions, and the natural efficacy of *second causes*—and finally, there is reason to think, that had man never fallen, and his posterity had continued pure and incorrupt, there would have been no instances of *poverty*, properly so called, amongst men. I next

II. PROVED from *scripture* and *reason*, that it was the will of God there should be this distinction of *rich* and *poor* in the world. And

III. OFFERED several arguments to prove this appointment of our maker to be righteous and

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and wise. The righteousness of it was easily proved, since all we have and are is the free gift of God, and he may justly do with his own what he will; nor can his larger bounty to some be injustice to others; and the following considerations prove this distinction in mens conditions, an appointment as wise as righteous.—By this means the order of society is better maintained, and the wants of it better supplied—this *inequality* is a standing conviction of the vanity of the world, and its little worth and importance, and that the happiness of man is of a higher nature, and lies not in this life, since external good things are not distributed according to mens *moral* characters; —and it gives men an opportunity for the trial, the exercise, the display of several virtues suitable to the condition of life they are in.—I have, by way of *Application*, represented the virtues peculiarly incumbent on the *rich*, and I now proceed to recommend those which peculiarly concern the *poor*. And as to them, since God has appointed their condition, it is their duty to be contented and satisfied in it, and to frame themselves and their behaviour agreeable thereto.

1. Is God the maker of the *poor*? Does he dispose their lot? They ought to be contented

tented and satisfied with it—in opposition to all murmuring and repining thoughts against the Providence of God—envy at the prosperity of others—and all desires and attempts to embroil and disturb the present settlement of things.

I. CONTENTMENT with our condition, if poor and destitute, is opposed to all murmuring and repining thoughts against the Providence of God. *Wisdom is justified of her children*; and 'tis one good sign that we are *the children of God*, when we are ready to vindicate the dispensations of his Providence towards us, even those which are most afflictive and humbling. *Epictetus* a *Heathen*, "profess'd his resolution to be an
"advocate for Providence, to think and
"speak honourably of his maker, however
"he dealt with him; and tho' others might
"be apt to reckon there was too much severity used towards him, yet he himself
"would stand forth and plead the cause of
"that sovereign Being, who had assigned
"him a condition so little comfortable."
This could a *Heathen* say, who was a slave, and a slave to one of the most barbarous and tyrannical of masters. What then shall we judge concerning those, who, injoying greater light, and in a condition nothing near so distressed

Matt. xi. 19.

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distressed as that of this poor man, are out of all patience, fret against the will of heaven, and inwardly charge the world's great ruler with partiality and injustice? Such as these have very little right to the name of *Christians*, and may well blush to be called by it. It is not only foolish to cherish such a temper as this, and like *kicking against the pricks*, in doing which we hurt none but ourselves, but 'tis exceeding wicked. Shall we presume to espy errors in the government of the world, and counsel him whose understanding is infinite? Shall we go about to controul him whose authority is absolute, and his power irresistible? Or arraign goodness itself as defective? Be sure what God *wills* is best; 'tis his *will* you should be *poor*, labour to be *contentedly poor*, and then your poverty shall never be imputed to you as your *fault*, but be an *exercise* of your virtues, and an *occasion* of your receiving a greater reward.

2. CONTENTMENT in a *poor* condition will banish envy at the prosperity of the *rich*. Envy is a plain indication of discontent; it shews that we do not approve the methods of Providence, that we have a conceit of ourselves, that we could manage things better, and make a wiser distribution of them. Such and such should not be *rich*, if we were to divide to every one his portion;

portion; to be sure we would take care that we ourselves and our friends should not be poor; ^b but who art thou vain man that repliest against thy maker? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Why hast thou made me to dishonour, and another to honour? Be silent, and know that he is God. Envy not whom he is pleased to favour. I confess we too easily slide into this passion of envy. ^c *The Scripture saith not in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.* The rich are but too prone to envy those who are richer than themselves. Thus 'tis observed by the sacred Historian, that when ^d *Isaac became very great, and had possession of flocks and herds, and great store of servants, the Philistines envied him.* And how much more may this be expected from the poor? 'Tis indeed somewhat more excusable in them, but however is justifiable in none. The rich man whom thou enviest is either a bad man or a good; if he be a wicked man there is no ground for envy, but a great deal for pity: ^e *Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.* Trust in the Lord, and

^b Rom. ix. 20.

^c Jam. iv. 5.

^d Gen. xxvi. 14.

^e Pl. xxxvii. 1.—

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do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Asaph confesseth of himself, that he ^f was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. That the ungodly should prosper in the world, and increase in riches, was for some time such a stumbling-block to his reason, that he was almost about to say, that he had cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency; nor could he get satisfaction to his disquieted mind, till he went into the sanctuary of God, and then understood their end. Let the sinner's present condition be as happy as he would have it, his end is miserable; his prosperity is only like the nourishing a victim against the day of slaughter. If the same man be both *rich* and *pious*, there is something very *unjust* in thy envying him. Thou shouldest rather rejoice to see any part of the world in such good hands, and that religion by this means appears to greater advantage in the eyes of men.

3. CONTENTMENT in one's condition, is an enemy to all desires and attempts to embroil and disturb the settled order of things. Some people are perpetually restless, like moles working under ground, who discover themselves by throwing up the earth

^f Pf. lxxiii. 3.—

in heaps, and thereby spoiling it's level surface. We have seen instances of this in our times, I mean of persons, who, out of dislike of their *indigent* circumstances (which they have made worse by their *idleness* and *intemperance*) and *envy* of their wealthier neighbours, have formed clubs, and been guilty of such outrageous and tumultuous proceedings, as neither the laws of God or man will allow. And History is full of such examples; societies have been shaken, and sometimes nigh ruined by this seditious spirit; the malecontents either choosing a leader from amongst themselves, or some designing men to serve their own ends, putting themselves at the head of certain loose fellows of the baser sort, have gathered a company, and set cities and kingdoms in an uproar, to the indangering the peace of both, and the loss of many thousand lives. The pretence has generally been the *reforming* of persons, and *redressing* of grievances, when really they themselves have stood most in need of a *reformation*, and the great *grievance* has been the *meannefs* of their condition, which would not allow of their living so idly, and spending so freely, as they saw many others could do. Hence [†] *come these wars and fightings, even from mens lusts which war in their members; they desire to have, and have*

† James iv. 1,—3.

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have not, because they ask not; they ask and receive not, because they ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts. In all these cases 'tis very probable that some are imposed upon by the *sounds* of liberty and property, of oppression and extortion, and act in the simplicity of their hearts; but however these may do, the greater numbers, and especially the *contrivers* of the mischief, are under the influence of a *discontented* mind, and disapprove the present order of affairs, because they are not uppermost. When persons, who make a profession of religion, ingage themselves among these troublers of the world, and it may be, are some of the ring-leaders, it becomes matter of great scandal and prejudice against a good cause, as if the principles of that were not very friendly to the peace of the world. St. Paul's advice to the christians of *Thessalonica*, and in them to all professing the gospel, is ^h *that they would study to be quiet*; and he not only *advises* them to this, but even *beseeches* them, as knowing how much the credit of christianity depended upon it, which would suffer very much by the busy and turbulent spirits of some, who sheltered themselves under this sacred name. ⁱ *God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, and therefore a quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price*;

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and

Theff. iv. 11. ⁱ 1 Cor. xiv. 33. 1 Pet. iii. 4.

and this not only in the *churches of Christ*, but in *civil societies*, as it bespeaks a submission to the divine will, and a contentment and satisfaction in the station assigned us.

2. IT is the duty of the *poor*, God having appointed their lot, to frame themselves and their behaviour agreeably thereto. That is,

1. THEY should carry it modestly and respectfully towards their superiours. Since Providence has seen fit to make a distinction between men, in regard of worldly advantages, every *prudent* person will think it reasonable so far to comply with it, as to suit his demeanour to his circumstances, and much more should every *good* man do this; for *christianity* was never designed to overturn the order of societies, neither does it any way clash or interfere with the civil denominations which are found amongst mankind, and the duties resulting from them. Whatever men were bound to practise by the *reason* of things antecedently to the *gospel*, instead of being set at liberty by that, they are laid under stronger ties to the performance of the same duties by the precepts of Christ. 'Tis our *Saviour's* command, by the mouth of his *Apostle*, that we ^k render to all their due, custom to whom custom is due, honour to whom honour. We should

^k Rom. xiii. 7.

should fall in with the innocent usages of our country, not refusing to pay those marks of *civility* to the persons of men which that has established. Observe I speak only of the *external* deportment; as to *inward* and *real* esteem, that is not to be measured by *riches* or *poverty*, or any other such foreign considerations, but by mens intrinsic qualities and usefulness. The *Psalmist* therefore, describing a religious man, speaks of him as one ¹ *in whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.* If you see a man eminent for piety and holiness, you ought to reverence the image of God in him, how much soever he may be slighted and neglected by others, on account of his obscure condition in the world. As on the contrary, if you see a wicked man, an enemy to God and religion, be he never so wealthy, you ought not to be so dazzled by the figure he makes, as to fall down and worship the golden idol. Yet still it remains true, that a humble, compliant behaviour is very becoming those in a low condition. The *poor* should not give offence to others who are above them, by with-holding that outward respect and honour which they look for; they should carefully avoid what in them would be construed as pride and conceit; for of the *two* it cannot be denied,

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that

¹ Pf. xv. 4.

that *pride* and *stiffness* are less tolerable in the *poor* man, than in the *rich*; the world will never give those liberties to the former, and his very circumstances concur to mind him of his duty, and teach him humility: and did the poor (those of them especially who pretend to religion) so avoid an abject flattering carriage towards their superiours, as at the same time to practise an obliging and christian humility, I am persuaded it would be one means of possessing the rich with a better opinion of them and of religion.

2. ARE you poor? Yet resolve to be honest. This is one of the chief temptations to which persons, whose circumstances are narrow, and their necessities pressing, are liable; I mean the temptation of making use of unlawful and shuffling methods to mend their condition. And they are ready to think, that their *poverty* will be their *justification*, wherein they are very much mistaken. The command is, ^m *let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.* Servants are to be exhorted ⁿ *not to purloin, but to show all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.* The meanest persons are capable of adorning the gospel, provided they will but study
to

^m Ephes. iv. 28,

ⁿ Tit. ii. 10.

to perform the duties of their station. An *honest* poor man is a credit to religion, and seldom fails of his share of respect, as indeed he deserves it; his resisting the temptations he is under, to be otherwise, showing him to have a good principle within him, and to be a person of integrity, which will always be an honourable character. There is the more need of caution in this matter, because, as I observed just now, the temptation to dishonesty is so strong, and so often proves too hard for those who are assaulted with it. ° *Give me not poverty, saith Agur, lest I steal, and take the name of the Lord in vain; i. e.* "least I steal, and being charged " with it, do, in order to clear myself, deny " the fact with oaths and imprecations;" which is often meant in scripture by *taking the Lord's name in vain*. God makes you *poor* for this end among others to try you, to see whether you can bear being pinched with want, and well acquit yourselves in straits and difficulties. Be determined therefore to act with the same strict justice, as if you enjoyed a fulness of all things.

3. THE poor, even because poor, are obliged to be *industrious*. Idleness is too common a distemper among poor people. Some are not ashamed to beg, who, by diligence in their employment, might earn a tolerable

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lively-

livelihood ; others half-starve themselves and families, out of their aversion to working ; both these sorts are very indifferent christians, not to mention those who had rather live by their *wits*, as they call it, than by their *hands* ; that is, in plain english, had rather get their bread by *wicked arts*, than by *honest labour*. The *New Testament* abounds with exhortations to *industry* in our calling. This *St. Paul* more than once presses on the *Thessalonians* ; ^P *That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we have commanded you. For we hear there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.* I cannot dismiss this passage without making two or three observations, which are not more obvious, than instructive and useful. The *first* is—That the same persons are idle and disorderly, work not at all, and are *busy-bodies* ; and 'tis no way strange to find those imployed as they ought not, who will not imploy themselves as they ought ; to find those, who hate their *own* business, meddling with *other* mens ; nothing is more common.—Another thing observable, is the *manner* of the exhortation, *by our Lord Jesus Christ*,

Christ. And why by him? But to signify, that as they tender the honour of Christ and his religion, they should avoid *idleness*, as a reproach and a scandal to their profession, and not think to excuse their inactivity in the pursuit of their *particular* calling, by their application to the duties of their *common* calling as christians. Religion is but a bad screen for sloth.—One thing more I would remark, that the *industrious* person *eats his own bread*; and is not this much better, as well as more creditable, than to subsist by the *charities* of others? Wherefore, in the words of the same Apostle to Titus, ¹ *let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.* You have the promise of God, that you shall not want what is *convenient* for you; but then 'tis with this *condition*, that *you do your part*. If men can labour, and will not, but instead of that will mispend their time, and what little money they can finger, they may complain of the *severity* of Providence, or the *unmercifulness* of the *times*, as long as they please, but must not expect to be regarded or pitied; the Apostle's rule being this, that ² *if any man will not work, neither should he eat.* No man has a privilege to be idle, if that may be called a privilege, which is not less prejudicial to a man's private interest;

¹ Tit. iii. 14.

² 2 Thess. iii. 10.

terest, than to the publick. The slothful man is useless to the common-wealth, and a burthen to society, and therefore unjust to it; and much more unjust to God, who has indowed him with faculties both of body and mind, for other purposes than to be sacrificed to the ease or appetites of the flesh. And as idleness, or not doing any thing that turns to account, is inexcusable in *all*, so 'tis doubly criminal in the *poor*, who must either work for themselves, or be chargeable to others.

4. *THEIR condition* being so indifferent in this world, the *poor* have the greater reason to look out for a *better*, and to make sure of a *better*. A *better* world there is, from which the *poor* are no more excluded than the *rich*; and at the same time, that the happiness of the next life lies as open to them, as to others, they have fewer ties and engagements to the present; they should therefore thus think and reason with themselves; "*tho' poor in this world, I am re-*
solved, by the grace of God, to be rich
in faith; not being a favourite of the
world, I will be the more solicitous to
obtain the favour of God; having no in-
heritance in this world, no, not so much
as to set my foot on, I will seek first the
kingdom of God, and endeavour to be an
heir of that. I have no treasure upon
earth,

“ earth, I will therefore *lay up* for myself
 “ *treasures in heaven*, and provide for my-
 “ self *bags that wax not old*. Here, like
 “ the *Son of Man*, I have no place of my
 “ own *where to lay my head*, I will therefore
 “ *set my affections on things above*, where I
 “ may hope for a *house not made with hands*,
 “ an *everlasting habitation*. Here I have my
 “ *evil things*, I will take care that my *good*
 “ *things* be to come, and not live so, as
 “ after death to fall into infinitely greater
 “ evils than any I now suffer. Not having
 “ *received the consolations* of this world, I
 “ will labour after a part in those of religion ;
 “ and certainly spiritual and divine consola-
 “ tions, the delights of communion with
 “ God, the joy of the Holy Ghost, the
 “ peace of a good conscience, the pleasures
 “ of faith, and love, and hope, are vastly
 “ preferable to all the pleasures of sense, the
 “ possessions of the world, and the enjoy-
 “ ments of time !” This was *Lazarus’s*
 wisdom and happiness, once ‘ *laid at the Rich*
Man’s gate full of sores, now in *Abraham’s*
bosom ; on earth one of the most miserable
 of men, in heaven glorious, like the angels
 of light ; his piety commended him to the
 love of God, and the love of God com-
 mended him to the *care of angels*, to con-
 duct his soul in his passage out of this sinful
 world,

world to the mansions of rest and felicity above. Hear what God saith by the *Prophet*, *'I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.* God does as it were invite the *poor* man, and his *necessities* drive him to take sanctuary in the divine Providence and goodness, and to devote himself to a life of religion and heavenly mindedness.

I HAVE now finished my *first* observation from the words, and proceed to the

II. THAT setting aside the *inequality* there is in the outward circumstances of rich and poor, they are in all other respects upon *equal* terms. *The rich and the poor meet together*, i. e. as to the main things they are upon a *level*; there is little or no difference between them as to the *principal advantages* or *disadvantages* attending human nature. To note this *equality*, the ^u *rich* were not to give more, nor the *poor* less than *half a shekel* when they made an offering to the Lord as an atonement for their soul. The following considerations will shew this Proposition to be indisputable—they have the same natural indowments and infirmities—have the same title to the care and protection of divine Providence—are upon a level
in

^t Zephan. iii. 12. ^u Exod. xxx. 15.

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in regard of their christian privileges—and must undergo the same impartial judgment.

I. THEY have the same nature, indowed with the same faculties, and subject to the same weakneses and infelicities. Their souls are equally derived from God ^w *the Father of spirits*, are of the same substance and dignity, alike reasonable and immortal: education may polish and improve the minds of the rich, and thereby make some difference where nature has made none; the poor man bears the image of his maker as well as the rich, and is alike a-kin to superiour and angelical Beings. As to the flesh, they are all the children of *Adam*, God having ^z *made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth*. Their bodies were moulded out of the same clay, without any distinction between them as to beauty or strength; they are both of them born with the same original passions, the same seeds of diseases, and under the same law of mortality; only that the *rich*, by their way of living, do frequently spoil a good constitution, hasten their own death, and intail a crazy, miserable Being on their posterity. *The rich and the poor meet together in the grave, there the mean man lies undistinguished y with kings and counsellors*
of

^w Heb. xii. 9. ^z Acts xvii. 26. ^y Job iii. 14.—

of the earth, who built desolate places for themselves, and with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver. The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master. Death abolishes all those distinctions, and brings back the natural and primitive equality between men, they die as they are born, ^a they brought nothing into the world, and can carry nothing out of it, but return naked as they came. What then is human greatness! A shining meteor, a painted cloud, which being raised out of the ground, will soon fall back to it again!

2. THE care and protection of divine Providence is alike extended to both. ^a *The poor committeth himself to God, who delivereth the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that has no helper. They may seem to be neglected by their Creator, much after the same manner as they are by their fellow-creatures, but in reality a vigilant eye is upon them, and an almighty arm defends them. If ^b a sparrow fall not to the ground without the permission of heaven, much less does a poor man. The rich may be ready to think, because God advances them in this world, that therefore he has a special favour for them, but it is a foolish thought; for the great ^c God accepteth not the persons of princes,*
nor

^a 1 Tim. vi. 7. ^a Psal. x. 14.—lxxii. 12. ^b Mat. x. 29. ^c Job xxxiv. 19.

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nor regardeth the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands: nay, the poor man, who feareth God and worketh righteousness, is the peculiar charge of the most High, how little soever appearances may favour such an assertion; God keepeth him as a man keepeth the apple of his eye, is tenderly concerned for his welfare, directs every step, and guards him from all harm. Happy man: to whose benefit angels minister, and all things else contribute; who has Providence for his guide, and all-sufficiency for his portion; ^d having nothing, this man possesseth all things.

3. IN regard of their christian privileges, the rich and the poor are upon a level. ^e *To the poor the gospel is preached; nay, and those who first embraced the gospel, were for the greater part of this number. ^f Ye see your calling, brethren, (saith St. Paul to the Corinthians) how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised has God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should*

^d 2 Cor. vi. 10.
i. 26.—

^e Matt. xi. v.

^f 1 Cor.

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should glory in his presence. The mean appearance of our Saviour so little agreeing to a carnal fancy, the plainness and simplicity of the Gospel, together with the poverty of those who published it, were so many hindrances to the success of Christ's religion among the great men of the world, who as they were prejudiced by these things, so being in friendship with this world, and plunged in its cares or pleasures, were little affected with the relation which the Gospel gave them of a future state of happiness beyond the grave; they liked their present condition, and wished for nothing but the continuance of that, regardless of any life to come; and generally speaking, it is much the same still. The same Baptism is common to rich and poor, and confers all the same rights and privileges. ^e By one Spirit they are all baptized into one body, whether they be bond or free, in which body the members are more or less honourable, not according to their worldly riches or poverty, but the measure of gifts and of graces that is poured out upon them. In the church ^h there is neither Greek nor Jew, Circumcision no Uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, Bond or Free; but Christ is all and in all, He is the best christian in whom there is the most of Christ. The rich and the poor meet together

^e 1 Cor. xii. 13.

^h Gal. iii. 28.

Col. iii. 11.

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together in the same worshipping Assembly, and at the same holy Table; nor is there any difference between them as to their wants, or enjoyments, or expectations; ¹ *the same Lord is rich in mercy to all that call upon him*: they are *both* to be sensible of their own poverty and wretchedness, and to cast themselves upon the free *grace* of God, and with this condition they stand *equally* fair for his covenant blessings. The *terms* of salvation are the *same* for rich and poor; and there is not one way to heaven for this man, and another for that; the ^k *way* of life is narrow for all men, and *the gate* strait, or if there be any odds, it seems to be stricter to the *rich* than to the *poor*; since, according to our Saviour's manner of expressing this difficulty, ¹ *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*; but then, if the *rich* do thus hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven, the cause is in themselves and in their love of riches, not without them in the conditions of the gospel covenant, which are no harder to one man than they are to another. To denote this *equality* among christians in point of *gospel privileges and enjoyments*, they are in scrip-

¹ Rom. x. 12.
xix. 24.

^k Matt. vii. 14.

¹ Matt.

ture stiled brethren, because ^m partakers of the same heavenly calling; but then this brotherhood being spiritual, is no way inconsistent with the subordination among christians on civil accounts. None are to imagine that the Gospel gives them a licence to throw off their subjection to those whom Providence has placed over them, or to treat them as their equals. To obviate any such thought the *Apostle* lays down this instruction, ⁿ that as many servants as are under the yoke, should count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And as for them who have believing masters, they should not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. That a master, or any other superiour is a fellow-christian, or a fellow-communicant is an additional ingagement upon us to pay him all due honour and obedience, and to do it the more chearfully because of his relation to us in the unity of the spirit, and the bonds of christian love.

4. RICH and poor must undergo the same impartial judgment. They must all meet together before the tribunal of God, and there stand upon a level, unless their
works

^m Heb. iii. 1.

ⁿ 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

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works, which are to follow them, make a difference. The rich will have more to account for, and the poor less, but both will be judged ^o according to their works, whether good or bad, and their talents whether five, or two, or one, according to what they have done or received: ^p to whom much has been given, of them will the more be required; that is, in the inquiries of that day respect will be had to the actions of men, and to their several improvements, not to their persons; for as one man will not meet with the more favour because he was rich, so neither will another for no other reason but that he was poor. In the ¹ law the civil magistrate is commanded not to wrest judgment, or respect persons; either taking a gift from the rich, or out of a foolish pity countenancing the poor man in his cause: he must not honour the person of the great, or respect the person of the poor; in justice he must judge his neighbour: by these measures will God himself also proceed in the general and final judgment of the world. In courts of human justice the rich may have many friends, made so by bribes or threatnings, by fear or favour; but as the rich will have no more on the other side the grave than the poor, no more interest, or power, or wealth, so if he could

X 2

carry

^o 2 Cor. v. 10. Matt. xxv. 14.— ^p Luke xii. 48.
¹ Deut. xvi. 19. Exod. xxiii. 3. Lev. xix. 15.

carry his riches with him, yet they ⁹ *would not profit him in the day of wrath*; as neither will it avail the *poor* man to plead his poverty and wretchedness in order to move the compassion of his judge. Have not the *poorest* of you such a thing within you as *reason* and *conscience*? Have you not the *bible* to direct you, and *ministers* to instruct and warn you? Have you not means of *grace* and opportunities of acquainting yourselves with God, and working out your salvation? And can you suppose then that your *poverty* will be accepted in *excuse* of your ignorance and impenitence? O no! The *wicked*, whether *poor* or *rich*, will have that dreadful sentence past upon them, *'Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* And the *righteous*, whether *rich* or *poor* shall hear these joyful words, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

I SHALL close this subject with a brief *Application*,

I. SETTING aside the *inequality* of mens outward circumstances, are *rich* and *poor* upon an equal foot in other respects, partaking of the *same privileges* of *nature* and of *grace*? Then should the *rich* be instructed by

⁹ Prov. xi. 4.

¹ Matt. xxv. 34—

by this consideration to perform the duties which they owe to the *poor*, particularly to treat them with kindness and humanity, not after a cruel, and imperious, or disdainful manner. The *unmerciful* man who sees his brother in distress, and refuses to help when it is in the power of his hands to do it, does as it were *hide himself from his own flesh*; there being a natural relation between mankind as the posterity of the same father. To be *pittiless* is to be *inhuman*. If, says *Job*, *I despised the cause of my man-servant or my maid-servant when they contended with me, what shall I do when God riseth up, and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.* Consider man, he who begs or wants thy charity, may reasonably expect it. Does not *nature* itself within thee plead the cause of the poor? If he is below thee, yet reflect that this superiority of thine is not natural but accidental; is for a little time only, not to last always. You are equal as *men*,

X 3

and

† *Isai*, lviii. 7.† *Job* xxxi. 13—

and so likewise as *christians*; wherefore you ought not to *" have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons*; you ought not to despise the *poor*, for as much as *God has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to them that love him.*

2. THIS consideration should reconcile the *poor* to their condition. All these worldly and temporary enjoyments are of very little value when compared with a reasonable nature, and an immortal duration, those intellectual faculties you enjoy *as men*, and those hopes of which you participate *as christians*, in all which you are *equal* to the greatest of the sons of men. Say therefore, " I will no more repine at
 " my lot, or think I am hardly dealt with.
 " I see now there is no great odds between
 " me and the men whom I have so often
 " envied; the agreement between us is in
 " more things, and those of infinitely greater
 " importance than the difference. In this
 " lottery of life a *blank* may fall to my share;
 " no matter, since I can make sure of an
 " immortal prize hereafter. The riches,
 " honours, and pleasures of the other world,
 " are not bestowed like those of the pre-
 " sent, with an undistinguishing hand, up-
 " on good and bad, the excellent, and the
 " unde-

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“ serving, but are the rewards of faith and
“ obedience, of humility, resignation, and
“ piety. Let who will therefore, or ra-
“ ther who God is pleased should have it,
“ carry away this world, as long as I have
“ invitation and opportunities to secure the
“ future felicity. May this be my portion
“ at last, and I trust that in the joyful ex-
“ pectation of it, I shall *in patience possess*
“ *my soul*, quietly resign myself to the will
“ of God, and make the best of that con-
“ dition which he is pleased to allot me!”





S E R M O N XIII.

The excellence of charity.

I COR. xiii. 8.

Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

CHARITY, or (to use a word that comes nearer the original) *love*, is, in its largest sense, comprehensive of all vital religion, denoting a right disposition of mind towards all intelligent Beings, particularly, and above all to God himself, the fountain of Being, perfection and happiness. In this chapter, the Apostle *Paul*, takes occasion, from the state of the *Corinthian* church, in which he seems to have observed some things not very consistent with the dictates of christian

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istian charity, to describe this noble affection of soul, as it more immediately respects men; and a most admirable description it is; setting the thing before us in such a lively and agreeable view, that if willing to know the nature of the virtue represented, we cannot possibly mistake it; and if willing to practise it, cannot want motives and inducements to do it, taken from the intrinsic loveliness of *charity*, and its most beneficial effects. How some persons can read this animated description and not blush, when they reflect how little they see of their own temper and behaviour in it, it is hard to conceive. *Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, (or falsehood to the disadvantage of others) but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* But can the generality of christians, even those that make very high pretences to religion, say all this of their *charity*? They may say it themselves, but no body else will, that impartially considers their temper and behaviour.

THE Text asserts the superiour excellence of *charity* above the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, in that *charity* (or the love of God

God and man) is of such intrinſick and immutable goodneſs, that it will never be out of date, but be everlaſtingly neceſſary and amiable; whereas the *miraculous gifts*, which the Apoſtle has here his eye upon, were neceſſary only in that *particular period* of the church, and had an end with it.

BUT before I enter into the particular conſideration of this ſubject, I ſhall take the opportunity that now offers (not knowing when I ſhall have one more convenient) very briefly to obſerve the way which the Holy Ghoſt has taken, to inſtruct us in the high value that God puts upon the *moral* qualities and diſpoſitions of the ſoul, and which therefore we ought to ſet upon them by comparing them with other things, to which it always gives that the preference. We find thoſe *moral virtues*, or *internal graces*, or *holy habits* of mind (or whatever elſe you are pleaſed to call them, for it is pity to fall out about the *names* of things) compared in ſcripture with *poſitive inſtitutions*, with *temporal and occaſional virtues*, and with *extraordinary gifts*. My ſubject calls me to diſcourſe more eſpecially of the *laſt* of theſe; however I ſhall not quite overlook the *two* former, ſince by conſidering internal religion in all theſe *three* views of it at once, the vaſt advantage it has above all thoſe things which are too often ſubſtituted in the

room of it, will be the more apparent.—I shall be the shorter in my reflections, that I may the sooner come to my principal subject.

I. *THE moral dispositions* of the soul are compared with, and preferred to *positive institutions*. By these latter are meant, such duties as derive all their obligation from the revealed will of God. Had not God in his word expressly said, *Do this and that*, the nature of the things is such, that from thence alone men could never have known it to be the will of God, that they should perform such actions; and accordingly it would not have been their duty to perform them; that which makes this their duty, being nothing else, but God's instituting or appointing those things in some *external revelation* of himself, not by the *light and voice* of nature; which is the reason that they are called *positive duties or institutions*; they are so called in opposition to *moral duties*, which all mankind are capable, more or less, clearly and perfectly, of coming acquainted with. The whole body of the *ceremonial law* was made up of those *positive institutions*; and so great was the superstition of the *Jewish* people, to whom that law was given, that they were apt to lay the main, if not the whole stress on these *positive duties*; and to fancy that

that this would atone for the neglect of real inward piety and goodness: but the *Prophets* in former times, and our blessed *Saviour* afterwards, let them know the gross and dangerous mistake they run into in this matter. As to the *Prophets*, I shall content myself with citing this one passage of *Micah*, in which, in answer to that question, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? &c.* The answer returned is, *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* This it seems is what God gives the honourable appellation of *good* to, who certainly must be allowed to know best the true names of things, and to have the most undoubted right to impose them. *Justice, mercy, and a reverential pious regard to God*, are things *morally good* in themselves, and therefore *unchangeably and everlastingly good*; whereas the *ordinances* of the *ritual law*, and particularly *sacrifices*, were *good* only, as they were fitted to serve a *particular* occasion, were of no force, but as *positively* commanded; and even after they were commanded, were of no value in the sight of God, when separated

Micah vi. 6,—8.

parated from *righteousness* and *charity*, and that *devotion* and *piety* which has its abode in the heart.—The *Pharisees* in our Saviour's time, were mighty exact in discharging the *ceremonial* part of the law, and rather overdid it, notwithstanding which, our blessed Saviour (who well knew the men, their inside as well as out) calls them *hypocrites*; saying unto them, ^b *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, or fidelity.* All the other parts of the law have no weight in them compared with these, which are the sum and substance of true religion; and 'tis much the same with regard to the *Sacraments* of the Gospel; for tho' they are plain institutions of the christian religion, and exceeding useful; and tho' the *Lord's Supper* is an ordinance, which every true christian, who has a right notion of things, must esteem very highly, as a standing memorial of his blessed Saviour, yet it must still be remembered, that these *instrumental duties* of religion, are the *means* and not the *end*, which is the love of God, and of Jesus, and of one another, a holy and a heavenly conversation; and that the *means* must never usurp the place of the *end*, and
so

^b Matt. xxiii. 23.

so unhappily prove *a means* of defeating the end, instead of promoting it, as they were intended to do.

THE *Lord's Supper* is a most excellent and valuable institution; but why? Is it not because of it's tendency, when devoutly observed, to cherish in the soul all holy and godlike dispositions, to enkindle the warmest affections of love and gratitude to the Redeemer, and as it were to melt and dissolve the hearts of all christians into one, and thereby effectually to ingage them to the imitation of God and the Lamb, and to all offices of kindness and charity one towards another? If it be any thing, besides the aptitude which the ordinance of the *Supper* has to promote these and such like things, that renders it so very estimable, I should be glad to hear what: far be it from any of us, that we should imagine, that where these things are slighted or overlooked in our practice, any professions whatsoever, of respect and love to Christ, and zeal for his ordinances will be accepted. In vain will it be to plead in this case, *have we not eaten and drank in thy presence?* Have we not frequented thy Table, *shown forth thy death*, and celebrated thy boundless love, manifested in dying for us? For we must expect no other answer, but that to a like *expostulation*,

^c Luke xiii. 26, 27.

tion, *depart from me, for I know you not, ye workers of iniquity.* Let us prize the institutions of the Gospel, and as we are obliged to do, thankfully attend upon them. But withal, let us endeavour to have this fixed in the thoughts of our hearts continually, that ^a *the first and great commandment of all, is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind and strength; and that the second and like unto this, in value and importance, is, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, and that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets; as all the ritual institutions of religion are subordinate to them, and intended to promote and facilitate the observation of them.*

2. THE moral dispositions of the soul are compared with occasional and temporary virtues, and preferred to them. See the last verse of this chapter, *and now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* Can any words be more express and decisive? Is it not strange, that after the judgment of an inspired writer in this case, delivered in so clear and positive a manner, there should be any, taking to themselves the name of *christians*, who depreciate *charity*, or *love*, and place all in *faith*? *Faith* and *hope* have been coeval with the church of

^a Matt. xxii. 37.—

of God upon earth, and will continue as long as that does, but no longer, being of no further use when this present state of things is at an end; for which reason I call them *temporary* and *occasional virtues*: I call them *virtues* or *graces*, for such they are, and of indispensable necessity in this state of absence from the *place* and *object* of the christian's felicity; neither the *character* nor *condition* of the christian can be compleat without them; were it not for these, he would have no title to the *name* he is called by, nor be able to pass the time of his sojourning here below, with any tolerable comfort and satisfaction; nay, where these were not, true *charity* could have no being; the noblest original of *love to man*, and the most lasting security to it, being the *love of God*; and the *love of God* having no foundation to rest upon, without *faith* and *hope* in him: but still, strictly and properly understood, *faith* and *hope* are but *temporary* virtues. Where *vision* begins, *faith* ends; therefore *faith* and *sight* are opposed one to another, *we walk by faith, not by sight*; by *faith*, because *while at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*, with whom therefore we have no other way of conversing, but this of *faith*; whereas, when *absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord*, and then we shall

shall walk by *sight*. And so the same Apostle tells us concerning *hope*, that it is confined to this state of imperfection, and is itself an argument of the imperfection of this state; since ^f *hope that is seen, is not hope; for what a man seeth, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it; so that fruition will put a final period to hope.* Nor is it only in respect of *duration*, that *charity* or *love* has this preheminance above *faith* and *hope*, but on the account of real excellence and perfection: while they continue together, *charity* outshines, and as it were eclipses them; for not to observe, that there is the *faith of devils* (^g *for the devils believe and tremble*) and the *hope of hypocrites*; let us suppose that they are both genuine (in which case they vastly excel the *miraculous gifts* of the Spirit) yet are they inferiour to *love*, which is their crown of perfection: *faith* is immediately and properly seated in the *understanding*; *love* in the *heart*; one is an *intellectual* accomplishment, the other a *moral* quality; and 'tis the *heart* or *will*, with the *moral* qualites and dispositions of it, that constitutes and distinguishes the character of a holy and good Being. Wherever *faith* is a christian grace or virtue, 'tis *love* makes it,

^f Rom. viii. 24. ^g James ii. 19. Job xxvii. 8.

and proves it to be so; and tho' the whole condition of the gospel-covenant is sometimes expressed by this single term, yet *love* is always understood as the principal thing, which growing out of *faith* in God, raises the soul into a similitude or likeness to him. And with regard to *hope*, it may be observed, that any further than it creates *love*, *love* to God and man, it is a selfish affection: 'tis indeed very allowable to have this regard to ourselves and our own happiness; but tho' *hope* be allowable, in this view of it, as it regards our own private felicity, yet it's chief commendation is this, that it centers in God as it's object, with a complacential delight in him, and in it's respect to the recompence of reward, takes in the happiness of all our fellow-saints, as conjoined with our own; and besides this, does naturally tend to fill and warm the heart with the best affections and sentiments with regard to God, to our Redeemer, and to our christian brother. The heart that abounds with a well-grounded *hope*, ever abounds in the same proportion with holy *love*; such a heart is always large and capacious, being stretched by it's *hopes*; and readily lodges every one that is a proper object of it's benevolence and esteem.—And if where all these *three* (*faith*, *hope*, and *charity*) are indissolubly linked together in the breast of the true christian,

christian, *charity* is the greatest, the most perfect and excellent ; how much more, when *faith* and *hope* are found alone, which is too commonly the case. Let nominal christians if they please, and as long as they please, boast of their *faith*, and call that which is really *presumption*, the *full assurance of hope*. What then ? Are they ever the better men for this, or ever the nearer heaven, while they are without *charity* ; while the love of God (as a righteous and holy Being, whom it is as much the happiness as honour of all other intelligent Beings to resemble) is a stranger to their breasts, and they shut out from thence all but those, whom blind humour and partial fancy, and a conceited regard to their own opinions, recommend to them ? Were it really so that these persons, in the *controverted* Points, judged more truly than others, who visibly excelled them in the *practical* part of religion, particularly in *charity* (which is only supposed, for I am satisfied it seldom happens, and is then more the effect of *chance* than of any thing else, but were it so) yet the *practical* christian, the man who loves God and his neighbour, has a thousand times more of the spirit of christianity than the others ; and if in some things he be mistaken, and they are in the right, yet by his sincere endeavours to know the *truth as it is in*

Jesus, by his love of it, and the prevailing influence which the truth has upon his heart and life, he becomes *accepted in the beloved*, and intitled to the heavenly reward, while they with all their boasted knowledge and faith, and their foolish delusive hopes, shall sink down to the abodes of wicked and miserable spirits.

3. THAT *love or charity*, which is the *fruit of the Spirit*, is compared with it's extraordinary or miraculous gifts, and declared to be of much greater worth and excellence. There seems to have been an invidious emulation among the *Corinthians* upon the account of these *spiritual gifts*, and too much of ostentation and pride in the exercise of them, which makes the Apostle tell them, *that he would show them a more excellent way*, something that was better worth their zeal and attention, that would be a greater honour and ornament to them, and render them more useful to others, and give them greater ground of rejoicing in themselves. And what is this *more excellent way*? Why to walk in love, for so it follows; *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And tho' I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and tho' I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains* (perform the most

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most wonderful works that ever were) *and have not charity, I am nothing. And tho' I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and tho' I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* In these two last instances, the *appearance* of charity or love, is opposed to the *reality*. The parting with *all one's goods to feed the poor*, has the *appearance* of a superlative love to men, and *sacrificing life in defence of the truth*, has the *appearance* of a very uncommon degree of love to God, and yet if all these were *only an appearance*, the real principles that gave birth to those shining actions, being obstinate pride, steadiness of temper, vain-glory, or some other such motive, not an inward regard to the glory of God, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures; in this case, for want of that which is the life and substance of *charity*, all these false deceitful expressions of it, would only be wasting and throwing away what we had.—Then after the description of *charity* before-mentioned, follow the words of the Text, *Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* 'Tis to be hoped that in a christian audience, there are none that need to be told, that after our Saviour's ascension into heaven, he did (ac-

cording to his promise made to his disciples, that they should receive power to be his witnesses in all the earth) shed forth his *Spirit* upon them on the day of *Pentecost*, in a variety of *miraculous and extraordinary gifts*; that the most abundant measure of those *gifts* was bestowed upon the Apostles, who had likewise a power of communicating them to others, *by prayer and the laying on of their hands*; which was a thing peculiar to themselves. In consequence of this miraculous effusion of the *Spirit*, the *first* publishers of christianity were qualified in a supernatural way for the work to which God called them, to which no human abilities alone would have been equal; and wheresoever a christian church was planted, these *extraordinary gifts* were imparted, as highly necessary and useful in the first establishment of christianity, a religion so very different from the other religions of the world, which it was intended to conquer or abolish. These *extraordinary or miraculous gifts* related chiefly to one or more of the following things—to the doctrine itself, in which the world was to be instructed—or to the publication of it—or to its further confirmation and proof—or finally, the more orderly forming and governing christian societies, and conducting the worship of God in them.

I. THERE

I. THERE were *extrordinary gifts* immediately relating to the doctrine itself, in which the world was to be instructed. For, in order to have a compleat knowledge of this doctrine, so as clearly to discover the whole scheme or plan of gospel-truth, with what related to it in the former dispensations of religion, it was necessary that the Apostles of Christ should be *inspired* with it, to qualify them for authoritative and infallible interpreters of the Old Testament, that they might know what was of use to be cited and insisted upon from them, and might not mistake in their application of ancient types and prophecies; and be able to teach men the gospel of the kingdom, without omitting any necessary truths, or mixing false doctrines with true; these things, which they would not otherwise have known, or would have known less perfectly, were revealed unto them by the *Spirit*; and for the same reason, lower degrees of *inspiration* were necessary for the subordinate teachers of the church: among those gifts, *prophecy*, or *teaching* and *foretelling* things by *inspiration*; and not only ^h *the word of wisdom*, but *knowledge*, the *understanding* the *mysteries* of the *kingdom* of
Y 4 heaven,

^h 1 Cor. xii. 8.

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heaven, mentioned in this chapter, are most probably to be reckoned.

2. OTHER gifts had a more immediate respect to the publication of the christian doctrine. The greater part of the Apostles and other teachers of the gospel were illiterate persons, acquainted with none but their mother-tongue, and ignorant of the arts of persuasion; and none of them versed in all those languages, in which the Gospel was to be preached, that it might overspread all the kingdoms and nations of the earth. To supply this defect, they were *filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake with other tongues*, besides those which they had learned, *the Spirit giving them utterance*, with great boldness of speech and presence of mind; so they did at the first and most memorable descent of the Spirit, in the form of cloven tongues, like as of fire; insomuch that the multitude out of every nation under heaven, that were then at Jerusalem, were confounded, bearing that every man spake in his own language the wonderful works of God, saying one to another with amazement, *are not all these that speak Galileans?* men that have no other language, but that of their own country?

3. THERE were other gifts that related to the furthure confirmation or proof of the doctrine

! Acts ii. 4.—

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doctrine then taught. The intrinſick excellence of the doctrine or religion of Chriſt, was itſelf an evidence of its truth ; but as this might be overlooked, and could not work a conviction till after an impartial inquiry into things, and ſerious conſideration of them, *external proofs* were therefore vouchſafed ; ^k *God himſelf bearing witneſs to the Apoſtles, with ſigns, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt.* Every *miraculous gift*, when rightly attended to, had the nature of a *proof* ; but that which was moſt directly ſubſervient to this end, that which ſtruck the world moſt ſenſibly, and engaged the attention of mens minds moſt irrefiſtibly, was the power of *working miracles*, that is, of doing ſuch things in teſtimony that God was with them, as did manifeſtly exceed any human power to perform ; ſuch as healing the ſick, curing the lame and the blind without the uſe of proper remedies, and raiſing the dead ; theſe wonderful works commanded reſpect where there was nothing in the outward appearance of the performer to do it. The preachers, mean as they were, obtained a hearing for their doctrine ; and when the doctrine they taught, and the miracles they performed, were taken together, no further evidence was wanting to convince men of all ranks and

^k Heb. ii. 4.

and capacities, all but the obstinately wicked, and the incorrigibly prejudiced, of the truth of the Gospel.

4. THE state of things was such at that time, that *supernatural gifts* were necessary for the orderly forming and governing christian societies, and conducting the worship of God in them. To this end served the ¹ *discerning of spirits*, a peculiar skill in *directing* and *presiding* over persons and affairs, stiled *governments*, the *interpretation of tongues*, and the like; all these things might be more largely and very usefully treated of, but as the time will not permit it, so what has been said may be sufficient to my present purpose, which was to give you some idea of the nature of these *extraordinary or miraculous gifts of the Spirit*; to all which *useful*, and *even necessary* as they were at that time, *charity*, or *love*, is here preferred by one of the *chief of the Apostles*, who, as he enjoyed these *extraordinary gifts* in an *extraordinary degree*, so was a most remarkable example of that *charity* which he so much extols; perhaps, next to his divine master, as eminent a pattern as ever was. The comparison between *love* and the *supernatural gifts of the Spirit*, by which the superiour excellence of the former is intended to be shown, turns upon this, that the *one* was

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was never to cease, the *others* were. Let us consider this a little. What is here said, may be understood of the *following ages* of the church in this world, or of that *state of perfection* to which all the sincere members of the christian church, are advanced in the life to come.

I. As to the *following ages* of the church in this world, the Apostle's observation holds good, that *charity*, or *love* was never to fail; but that *prophecy*, and *tongues*, and other *miraculous gifts* would. And so much seems to be intended in the last verse of the chapter, which has been considered before, *viz. and now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. And now*; that is, during the state of things that *now is*, which will continue to the end of the world, these *three* things will never be antiquated; as much as to say, the *extraordinary gifts and endowments of the Spirit* will cease, after the occasion has been answered for which they were imparted; but *charity*, with *faith and hope*, will still abide. And indeed what good reason can be given, why all, or any of these *miraculous gifts* should be continued? The evidence of christianity being compleated, the bounds of the christian church enlarged, the Gospel fully made known, and firmly established, the

the writings of the New Testament which contained the records of the gospel doctrine intire, and every where dispersed, and the Apostles with that generation of men to whom they preached, dead and gone, it is perfectly agreeable to the wisdom of God to withdraw these *extraordinary manifestations of the divine presence* in the church, which were now no longer needed, and hardly so consistent with the trial of the ingenuity and impartiality of the christian's faith; according to our Saviour's reasoning, *“blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”*

THE *Papists* indeed will needs have it that the *catholick church*, i. e. *their particular church*, is still in possession of a *spirit of infallibility*, and a *power of working miracles*. But besides that this is affirmed without all proof, to what end are these things necessary? What necessity is there of an *infallible* interpreter, where the religion is a plain, simple institution, committed to writing, and in all points of *faith* and *practice* that are of importance to salvation, easy to be known by all serious and upright inquirers? A diversity of opinions in things of lesser moment, instead of being a prejudice to christianity, would really be a great advantage to the professors of it, if they made that use of it they ought to do, to exercise

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ercise and improve that *charity*, which is of more value than all the disputable opinions in the world. And what is it that makes a power of working miracles necessary? That the *true church of Christ* (say they) with which this gift is lodged, *may be distinguished from all other churches.* But is not *purity of doctrine*, for which we are to ^a *search the scriptures*, a much better distinction? Where this is found, must we not say, *there is the true church of Christ?* Where this is manifestly wanting among any party or denomination of christians, that if they retain so much truth as to be allowed a part of the *church catholick*, that is the utmost that can be allowed them; and whether they will or no, they must be pronounced to be a very *unsound* part of it, and a great dishonour and reproach to it, in spite of all their *legendary and lying wonders.* It is a bad symptom in the church of *Rome*, or any other party of christians, to make light of that *charity*, and even to trample under foot all the sacred rights of it, which the Apostle of the *Gentiles* saith, *should never fail.*—*Charity shall never fail.* What is the meaning that expression? Is it that *charity* itself, or the *virtue* so called, should in every age universally or generally prevail among the professors of christianity? Alas, constant experience

^a John v. 39.

perience shews the contrary, that *charity*, how much soever it be the characteristick of the religion of Christ, is not so of his followers; I mean of all that bear that name, though it be of all that are truly such. The thing intended therefore by *charity's never failing* is, that its *obligation* and *use* would be *perpetual*. Christians would be indispensibly obliged to love God, and one another, whether they did so or no; this would always be their greatest glory and ornament, would contribute most to the strength and beauty of the christian society, make every other virtue flourish, and be the most likely way of promoting truth itself, and bringing the enemies of religion to think well of it. In a word, the christian church appears like a glorious fabrick, *whose builder and maker is God*, when *charity* cements the several parts, and is diffused through and over the whole. *Extraordinary gifts* ceased much after the same manner as the scaffolding is taken down, when the edifice is raised; whereas *charity* is an essential part of the structure, gives it its stability, and renders it a delightful habitation. Nay, *charity* is the grand means or instrument of the church's edification, according to that of the Apostle Paul, ° *that speaking the truth in love, we may grow*

° Eph. iv. 15, 16.

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grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ: &c.

2. THE assertion in the Text, will be most evidently verified in that *state of perfection* to which all the sincere members of the christian church shall be advanced in the life to come.

THE church triumphant will need none of these, or any other sort of extraneous helps. Even that knowledge which the Apostles themselves had, large as it was, and in the way of *inspiration*, was as it were lost and vanished away, when they entered into the world of vision; just as the light of the stars disappears, and is swallowed up in that of the sun; *for now, saith the Apostle, we know in part, and we prophesy in part; it is comparatively, but a small part of the perfections and works of God, the knowledge of which is now communicated to us; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I also am known by superiour intelligences. Both the degree and manner of knowing will be different. I shall know myself and them; I shall know God that*
most

most adorable Being, and the works of God, so as I never before knew them, so as never man did, or could know them in this dark imperfect state. And if the understanding and knowledge of an Apostle receive such vast improvement, how much more that of common christians. In consequence of this perfection of knowledge, *charity shall never fail*. Possibly the time may come in the course of ages, when this present sun, and these stars shall go out, and their fires be quite spent, but *love* is such a flame as eternity itself shall never consume and extinguish; instead of that, it will, if possible, grow brighter and brighter, stronger and stronger.

THERE are *two* or *three* things which will conspire in an especial manner, to raise this noble affection, to its utmost degree of perfection and activity in heaven.

I. THE *first* is that which I have already observed, *viz. knowledge*, beholding the transcendent excellency of the divine nature, and having the clearest discernment, and strongest sense of the greatness of the divine benefits. They will love God with all the capacities of their souls; the warmth of the heart, the sacred warmth of love will be equal to the light of the mind; and I think nothing need, or can be said greater of it than

than that. And in God, and for God, to whom the blessed refer every thing, *they love one another with a pure heart fervently*; for they no longer mistake one another, as they too often do in this world, which occasions at best a shiness and estrangedness betwixt them, if not an alienation of affection, and unkind usage, under a false apprehension of their being enemies to God and religion, or no hearty friends. Not only God knows them that are his, but all that are his in the light of that upper world, are intimately acquainted with each others characters. Were there nothing else, their being joined to that glorious assembly, would alone be a demonstration that they were lovers of God, and beloved by him; the heavenly society not being like our earthly ones, which are composed of persons of very different tempers, and quite opposite moral characters; each knows every motive and inducement to love, which is in every other person, and knowing this, with the near and inseperable relation which every one bears to the Deity, feels himself united to every individual member of that vast society, in the most indissoluble ties of friendship and benevolence.

2. ANOTHER thing that causes the flourishing of love in the heavenly world is *holiness*, or the rectitude of the will, and all the moral powers of the soul. There is no

wrong inclination, no servile affection to controul and counter-balance this divine passion, upon which it breaks out into a flame, expands itself, increases its vigour, and shows itself to the utmost advantage. If the *Psalmist*, when he thought of those *few and faint* examples of peace, and love, and good-will that are sometimes met with in our cold regions, could say, *Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*; and if of the multitude of the first believers, the *Historian* observes to their praise, *that they were of one heart, and of one soul*, (so happy an influence had the principles of their new religion upon them) how can we think honourably enough of that state, or sufficiently extol and praise it, or long for it too ardently, when the *spirits of just men, being made perfect in holiness*, are perfect in love too; where their love of *righteousness* being exalted to the highest pitch, is attended with a proportionable love to the *righteous*, according to the several degrees in which they possess this glorious quality, and consequently with the most intense and seraphic affection of all to that God who is the fountain and ocean of all *moral*, as well as *natural* perfection?

3. THE

Psalm. cxxxiii. 1.
xii. 23.

Acts iv. 32.

Heb.

3. THE last thing that will unite the hearts of the blessed in the bands of a reciprocal love, is their *bleſſedneſs* itſelf. They are all happy, as full every one, of contentment and ſatisfaction as they can hold, and their own happineſs makes them delight in the happineſs of all thoſe who are their partners in bliſs. Happineſs, according to the nature and degree of it, has this effect in the preſent world, more imperfectly indeed, becauſe our happineſs here is more imperfect. The heart never ſo ſenſibly over-flows with benevolence, or good-will to others, as when it over-flows with joy. The man that is eaſy himſelf, not only in his outward circumſtances, but in his temper and reflections too, that is ſatisfied with his condition, and intereſted in the divine favour, would have others ſo too; ſuch a one naturally compaſſionates the miſerable, and as natural rejoices with them that rejoice. And what then may be expected in that world, where every thing within and without, invites the ſoul to indulge to ſacred joy? There, indeed, are no objects of miſery, on which our *charity* can be employed; but think not that this divine affection will therefore lie idle and uſeleſs; no, this very circumſtance will be the occaſion of its acting in the moſt natural and agreeable manner. The ſpirits of the bleſſed, will as it

were mingle with and flow into one another, and every individual in some respects, feel the transports of all the rest. And if this association and contact in a common happiness, will be the cause of their adhering closely to one another, how unconceivably vehement and delightful must the exercises of their love be to him, who is the great author and the supreme object of their felicity! And how naturally must every power and faculty of their souls center in him! And thus will they continue to eternity, *beholding God's face*, contemplating, loving, and adoring him; searching out his works, *ascribing glory to the lamb*, and delightfully conversing with angels and the redeemed of the Lord, joining their hearts and voices together, and mutually regarding the happiness of others as their own. O who can swell his thoughts so far, as to comprehend the happiness contained in that one word *eternity*, when it is thus spent!

—I SHALL conclude this subject with a few remarks.

1. THE christian church has little reason to regret the cessation of the *extraordinary gifts* of the *Spirit*, since these were only subservient to the religion of the Gospel, of which a most essential, a most beautiful, and

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and a most agreeable part is, *that charity which never faileth.*

WHEN the *seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us in thy name*; our Saviour, at the same time that he fore-tells the fall of Satan like lightning from heaven, and tells his disciples, that he would give them power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, so that nothing should hurt them; adds, notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven. And why then should christians of following ages, think their condition upon this account so much inferiour to that of Christ's first disciples, when there is no christian but may have his name inserted in this heavenly register; when the *sanctifying and comforting operations of the Spirit*, are still continued, though not the *miraculous ones*, its graces, though not its *extraordinary gifts*; and particularly *charity, which is the bond of perfectness*?

2. If we have a mind to bring down heaven upon earth, to please our Saviour, to edify his members, and advance the credit of his religion, let us follow after *charity*, for *charity* will lead us into the paths of peace and pleasure now, and conduct us

Z 3

1 Luke x. 17—20.

1 Coloss. iii. 14.

to the regions of happiness hereafter. *Charity* will be the best evidence of our christianity, and most lovely feature of the divine image upon our souls; *charity* will adorn our faith, animate our hopes, guide and temper our zeal, procure us the esteem of men, and the approbation of God; and in a word, *charity* will not make a man ashamed in the reflection, as indulgence to an angry, uncharitable, contentious humour, certainly will first or last.

To add no more.

3. HERE we see the peculiar excellence of the christian religion, and particularly of this part of it, the institution of the *Supper*. Love is the best affection of the human heart; the love of God and man, the noblest species of love. This love every thing belonging to christianity evidently tends to inspire; its precepts, doctrines, examples, promises; the point of view in which they all terminate is *charity* or *love*.—"That thy
 " love, O my soul, might be blown into a
 " flame, thou art invited to the *Lord's-Table*;
 " for here thy fellowship is with the Father,
 " and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with
 " all saints; here thou hast an example before
 " thee of the most unparalleled love that ever
 " was. And to what end, but that in imitation of it, thou shouldest make thyself a
 " sacrifice and an offering of love? That thou
 " shouldest

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“ shouldest love God, and thy brother, thy
“ master, and thy fellow-disciples? Whether
“ I worthily partake of the *Lord's-Supper*, I
“ will try, among other marks, by my *cha-*
“ *rity*; and my *charity* by those properties
“ which the Apostle *Paul* ascribes to this ex-
“ cellent virtue. May God, who is love,
“ transform me into his image by the spirit
“ of love dwelling in me! May I have the
“ love of Jesus continually in remembrance
“ to animate and inflame me, and by the
“ *grace* of God, always act as one who is
“ under the prevailing influence of this di-
“ vine affection, and endeavouring to be-
“ come more meet, to enter into those blef-
“ sed regions, where love reigns and triumphs
“ for ever!”





S E R M O N XIV.

Men naturally capable of knowing
and doing well.

GEN. IV. 7.

*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be
accepted?*

THESE words are very remarkable
in whatever view we take them;
whether,

1. WE consider them *absolutely*; or
2. WITH relation to the *speaker*; or
3. ADD the consideration of the *person*
to whom they were spoken, and of that
which gave *occasion* to them.

1. THIS passage of holy scripture is very
remarkable, if we only take an *absolute* view
of it, or just as the words lie before us,
without

without regarding the particular circumstances of them, as it evidently contains and holds forth to us, these following most important truths.

I. THAT men know, or may know, that there is such a thing as *doing well*, in a moral and religious sense, and what it is.

II. THAT they are not under an absolute incapacity of *doing well*.

III. THAT *doing well* they shall be *accepted of God*.

IV. THAT they have no reason to hope for *acceptance* without it.

THESE are considerations of very great moment, as great as any can be conceived to be, and are all of them manifestly comprehended in the natural and obvious meaning of the words. It is true these several truths are proposed in the form of a *supposition*, and a *question* founded on that *supposition*; but then, though it be only a case *supposed* (*if thou doest well*) yet the *supposition* was designed to be understood of something *easy to be known*, and *possible to be done*; not surely of something *impossible* in itself so, or with regard to the person concerned. And though it be only put in the manner of a *question* (*shalt thou not be accepted?*) the *question* it is plain, has all the force of a strong affirmation;

affirmation; nor would the sense of the whole have been more clear and determinate to every unprejudiced reader, if it had been said in so many words, *Thou mightest have done well; and hadst thou done so, I would have accepted thee, being no respecter of persons.* But the present mode of expression was rather chosen, as it has the nature of an *appeal* to the criminal himself, and so was better fitted to awaken his conscience, and to set the great unreasonableness of his temper and behaviour before him. Let us therefore *particularly* and *briefly* consider the several important truths now mentioned, since they undeniably belong to the true import of the words.

I. MEN know, or may know, that there is such a thing as *doing well*, in a religious and moral sense, and what it is.—This Proposition has *two* parts.

1. THEY know, whether they will or no, that there is such a thing as *doing well*. The most ignorant, are not ignorant of so much as this comes to, conscience will not suffer it; and indeed they would have no guilt, nor be capable of any, if they were; I say, if there was such a total darkness upon their minds, that they had not the least glimpse even of this general truth, *That*
God

God required and expected something from them, by way of acknowledgement of his perfections, and return for his benefits, or that every sort of behaviour was not alike reasonable. Men labouring under such a perfect ignorance as this, would be *innocent* whatever they did; for in this case there would be nothing within them to put them upon inquiring after their duty, and consequently, if for want of such inquiry, they were ignorant of their duty, their ignorance would be properly *invincible*, and clear them from all guilt, since that can be no duty which a man is not obliged to know; and he cannot be obliged to know what he is not obliged to inquire after; nor be obliged to inquire when he has no monitor within him to tell him that it is his duty to do it; but where there is a common share of understanding, such an ignorance as this is *impossible*. There is a conviction at the bottom of every man's soul (and it is no other than the voice of God within him) *that he is not left intirely at his liberty to go wherever his inclinations lead him, and to do whatever his passions prompt him to.* Some men, it is likely, would be glad to believe this, and may use their utmost endeavour to believe it, but after all, cannot avoid believing and knowing the contrary, *viz.* that there is such a distinction as *right and wrong, reasonable and un-*

unreasonable, commendable and blameable in actions; and that therefore it is their first and indispensable duty to inquire with all sincerity, what that particular behaviour is, which is *right, and reasonable, and commendable*, and what the *contrary*. If they have any reason to think that there is such a thing as *doing well*, they must unavoidably incur the reproaches of their own minds or consciences; if they neglect all means of informing themselves wherein this *doing well* doth consist.

2, THE next step is, that as men know that there are duties incumbent on them, so they do or may know what those duties are. *He has shown thee, O man, what is good.* God has shown this to all men; not to all men in the *same way*; not with the *same clearness and exactness*; but to all some way or other, and in some degree and measure or other. The degree of discovery is answerable to the degree of obligations that every man is under, and the extent of every one's knowledge, *actual or possible*, to the extent of his duty. What is my duty, all things considered, it cannot be *impossible* for me to know, for how then should it be my duty? So far is this from being *impossible*, that every sincere mind will easily understand what the *will of the Lord is*. Indeed, if men are not *sincere*, but make it their business

to

to deceive and impose upon themselves; if they wilfully draw a curtain before their own minds in order to shut out the light, and instead of being desirous to find out the truth, in *practice*, do their utmost endeavour to miss it, and make the most of every prejudice, and difficulty, and objection; it is no wonder, if by this means, they darken and perplex the plainest things, and have not that full conviction of their duty which they would otherwise have had. But be this to themselves, they alone are answerable for it, and will find that the *guilt* of any sinful commission or omission, is not at all lessened by such management, how artful and cunning soever they may account it. ^b *We shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord.* To the upright mind no prejudices are invincible, no difficulties unfurmountable, no objections unanswerable; such a one is *θεοδιδάκτος*, ^c *taught of God*; he has heard and learned of the Father; for God is ready to teach all those that are ready and always willing to learn. To discover the beauty and evidence of *moral* truth (or that truth which relates immediately to practice) a *clearness* of head is not so much required as a *rectitude* of heart. Wouldest thou know *what is good, and what the Lord thy God requires of thee*? Ask thy own *conscience*,

^b Hof. vi. 3.^c John vi. 45.

ence, consult the *word of God*, that infallible, that intelligible, and that everlasting oracle of truth. Consider what thou art as to thy *body*, and as to thy *soul*, which of these is the superiour and more valuable part; what thy powers and capacities are, and in what way thou shalt perfect them most, and exercise them to the greatest advantage for thyself and others. Consider what God is in *himself*, as a Being of all perfection, and *relatively* to thee, whose first existence, whose continual preservation, whose safety, comfort, usefulness, perfection and happiness, do all depend upon his free and undeserved goodness. Think seriously of all these things; then think what affections and dispositions of mind are most suitable and correspondent to them; then what is the genuine proper way of expressing such affections and dispositions in the life. Let thy thoughts converse much with these subjects, and it is not possible thou shouldest be ignorant of what is meant by *doing well*; thou wilt be sensible, that to *do well* is to walk humbly with God; to reverence and adore all his perfections, and to imitate those of them that are imitable by us; to fear him as the greatest, and to love him as the best of all Beings; to obey, and worship, and glorify him; to trust in him, and resign ourselves to him, as supremely worthy of all those acts, being only the tribute

bute which we naturally and indispenſibly owe him, and a reaſonable acknowledgement both of what he is in himſelf, and of what he is to us. With theſe thou wilt diſcover a great many other duties to be inſeparably connected, ſuch as *doing juſtly, and loving mercy*, with regard to thy *fellow-creatures*, and much more thy *fellow-chriſtians*; then thou wilt ſee an abſolute unchangeable goodneſs in ſuch things, and that thou muſt ceaſe to be the Being that God has made thee, before thou canſt ceaſe being obliged to practice them. All men being of one nature that dwell upon the face of the earth, and capable of happineſs alike, and all that name the name of Chriſt being of one holy fellowſhip, thou muſt acknowledge it to be altogether reaſonable ^d *that thou love thy neighbour as thy ſelf, doing to others as thou judgeſt they ought to do to thee*; that is, ſpeaking the truth, refraining from all injurious and offensive actions, and as thou haſt opportunity, contributing to their welfare and happineſs, becauſe this is what thou expecteſt from them. And as to thyſelf, God having endowed thee with underſtanding and a freedom of choice, has hereby made thee capable in ſome degree of being thy own keeper, and conſequently intruſted thee with the care of thyſelf, of thy *body*, but eſpecially

cially of thy *soul* ; so that by whatever actions thou shalt improve the faculties of thy mind, and so manage and imploy thy body as to make it subservient to thy nobler part, by this means becoming better fitted to answer and attain the great end of thy Being ; to all such actions as these, a little reflection will convince thee thou must be obliged, as carefully avoiding those that have a contrary influence, hurting thy body or mind, and incapacitating them for the performance of their proper operations, and as the necessary consequence of that, for the injoyment of their proper felicity. This is a short account of that *system* of duties which is denoted by *doing well*. And who that thinks and considers, can with-hold his assent from all these ; or deny that this deserves the name of *well doing* ? There are indeed, persons of a *reprobate or undiscerning mind*, but then they *made themselves* so by custom in sin : and even these cannot blind their understandings, and destroy the sensibility of their consciences so intirely as to make no difference at all in their *judgments* (for I speak not of their *practice*) between *moral* good and evil ; they cannot surely imagine, that to slight and forget, and much more to hate the author of their Beings, and fountain of all the good they injoy ; to be without

out the least grateful sense of his benefits, or never to discover it in our outward actions; to be perfectly indifferent to the happiness or misery of other men, and much more to oppose their happiness, and delight in their misery; to be the burthens of the earth, and plagues of society instead of blessings; to do good to none, and mischief to as many as we can; to infeeble our powers and faculties by sloth and inactivity; to drown our reason by intemperance, and to act as if we designed our own destruction rather than salvation and happiness; certainly it is impossible they should imagine all this is *doing well*, as properly so as if they took the direct contrary course. In some instances they may confound *light and darkness, sweet and bitter, and good and evil*; but not in all, not in the *whole kind*, so as not to be able to distinguish the brightest light from total darkness, the most delicious sweetness from the most disagreeable bitter, and the greatest good from the greatest evil. One would think, before they can do this, they must quite extinguish their reason, and sink themselves to a level with the beasts. This is the *first* Proposition contained in the words *absolutely* considered. — Men know, or may know, that there is such a thing as *doing*

Isa. v. 20.

well, in a religious and moral sense, and what it is.

II. MEN are not under an absolute incapacity of *doing well*. God has not laid them under any such incapacity, whatever they have done as to themselves by their wilful neglects and transgressions; they must acquit their maker in this respect, and acknowledge that he is righteous in all his commands, and in all the punishments which he inflicts for the violation of them; they cannot help acknowledging this, which is a plain confession of their *power to do better*. Immediately after the words of the Text, and in the very same verse it follows, *if thou doest not well, sin lieth at thy door*. But now where there is *no power to do well*, there can be *no sin* in not doing it, nor can a man's conscience reproach him for not doing what he could not do, or for doing what he could not avoid doing, unless he apprehends that he had a liberty of choice to one or to the other. Whoever blames himself for his actions must be *free*, or think that he is *free*, for if he verily believes that every action, and circumstance of action, is *necessarily* what it is, and could not *possibly* have been any other, that when he commits a *good* action, he is no more able to do it, all things considered, than a stone to leave the

the earth and mount upward; or when he does a *bad* one, that he is no more able to prevent it, than a stone in the air is to stop itself from falling to the ground; if, I say, a man *verily* believes this to be the case, he can never be uneasy with himself, never accuse or condemn himself. Whatever arguments therefore men may bring to prove that every thing is *fatal* and *necessary*, and how plausible soever they may be, it is plain whatever boasts they make of their reasonings, that they themselves are not satisfied with them; for if they were, whence is all that inward remorse, and disquiet, and fear, and shame, which they suffer after they have done some actions? Are they angry with themselves for not being able to stop the course of a rapid river when it breaks its banks, and over-flows all the neighbouring country? Do they charge themselves with all the evil actions that are done in the world, and put them to their own account? No man is so foolish as to do this; and yet he might as well do this, as esteem himself answerable for his *own* actions, if his *own* were no more under his power and direction than those of *other* men.—*Conscience* is instead of a *thousand* proofs, that men labour under no such *moral* incapacity as this. The supposition, *if thou doest well*, is an appeal to *conscience*, which upon some mens prin-

ciples, might have made this short unanswerable reply. *If you do well*—as justly might it have been said, if you do *impossibilities*, if you can hinder the rising or setting of the sun, live without eating or drinking, and the like. The question at present, is not how we come to be able *to do well*; or how much of this power is *natural*, and how much of it *supernatural*. It is enough, that whatever is my duty, is not upon the whole *impossible*. Is it my duty to pray to God? It is certain I can do it. Is it my duty to pray to him for his *grace* to heal my diseased nature, and help all my infirmities, as well as for other good things? It is undeniable, that what God commands he will give me power to do. Are some things *forbidden*, others *injoined* me? The foundation of this is, that the first sort of things are *evil*, and the others *good*, and that I am able to yield obedience to the laws of God, if I make that use of my natural powers and faculties in subservience to, and dependance upon the *grace* of God, which I ought to do, and may do; otherwise I should not be a *moral* agent, a *moral* agent being one that has a power of determining himself, that is, of doing *good* and eschewing *evil*, and thereby working out his own happiness: and if I am not a *moral* agent, I am not a capable subject of rewards and punishments, which no
believer

believer of revelation will pretend to assert. But is not *nature* very much hurted by the *fall*? And by *actual sin* is it not depraved still more and more? And can man restore himself, repair his broken powers, and make himself a new creature? My answer is, that whosoever should object after this manner, would confound *two* things that are perfectly distinct; *viz. doing well*, and being *pre-vailingly well inclined*; good *actions*, and good *dispositions*. To *do well* in general, is nothing more than performing our duty in the best manner we are able; and to deny that we are able to do this, is an express contradiction, it being the same as saying that we are at the same time *able*, and *not able* to do a thing. The consequence of this is, that if we perform our duty towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves in the best manner we can, God will increase our strength, and by degrees so alter the habitual temper of our minds, that we shall be able to perform our duty with greater care, and vigour, and constancy, and by consequence with greater pleasure. Good *actions* (a divine influence perpetually co-operating) will produce good *dispositions*, which in their turn will be continually prompting us to do good *actions*, and make us to delight in doing them. So that you see, though from the beginning to the end, we have a ne-

cessary dependance upon God, yet it is undeniably evident, and very proper to say, that upon the whole *we are able to do well*, being commanded to do it. This is the *second* Proposition, which by what has been said, appears to contain a truth of no little moment. It is not a thing of small consequence which side of the question we take, that *we are*, or that *we are not* able to do well; since he that holds the *affirmative*, does more honour to all the perfections of God, has more encouragement to exert his utmost endeavours, and must take to himself the whole blame of his sinful commissions or omissions: whereas the *negative* part of the question, that no man can do *more good*, or *less evil* than he does, together with a high reflection upon the Deity, with regard to the essential attributes of his nature, and as the Creator and Governour of the world, carries in it an *apology* for all wickedness, and is a principle of such a poisonous and malignant nature as to kill all the seeds of piety and goodness.

III. *ANOTHER* Proposition is, That in *well doing* men know that they shall be *accepted of God*. The question (*shalt thou not be accepted?*) implies so much. Hast thou any good reason to think otherwise, or even to doubt it? Thou hast not.

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THIS acceptance includes *three* things—a favourable regard to our persons—a well-pleasedness with our services—and finally, proper testimonies of both, especially in the final rewards which God bestows upon all those that *patiently continue in well-doing.*

I. GOD'S accepting us, denotes a favourable regard to our persons. *God loveth the righteous, and delighteth in them that fear him.* And this he does according to the degree of their righteousness or goodness. He that *does well* is beloved of God, he that *does better* is better beloved, he that does *best* is most beloved of all. And if we coolly attend to it, this will not be deemed a consideration of small weight. If I am in a state of acceptance with God, I am then among those whom he approves, those who under all their infirmities pass in the judgment of God for persons of integrity, *the excellent of the earth*, men of some *real* worth and regard; he pronounces me upon the whole, one fitted to be received into his friendship, and to have a part in his *special favour*. And for certain, neither the honour nor happiness of this is a trifle. The only difficulty is to know which is greatest, whether the honour of being approved by the wisest

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and best of all Beings, or the happiness of being in favour with the most powerful, and at the same time the most beneficent too. But without deciding this, it is enough that the honour is as great as the most unbounded ambition can reach at, and the happiness equal to the most insatiable self-love rightly directed. There cannot be a greater privilege than being *accepted of God*, as I shall show more fully afterwards, which is the reason of my just hinting at it here. God's *accepting* some men and not others, does not signify his having a *partial* regard to them for which no account can be given. In this sense it is often said in scripture, that ^h *God accepteth not the persons of men*; by which the same thing is meant as by his being *no respecter of persons*; that is, he is not taken with a mere *outside* (for so the word *person* is often understood) with external appearances and considerations, such things as do not render the person better or wiser, any more than the dress or the mask does which a man wears. But when we speak of the *whole* person, what a man is *inwardly*, in the temper and habit of his mind, then it is certain God *accepts* one man and not another. The *righteous* are always acceptable to him in this sense; and therefore, after the Apostle Peter had observed *that God was*

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^h Job xxxiv. 19. Gal. ii. 6. Acts x. 34, 35.

no respecter of persons, (in opposition to that narrow notion of the *Jews*, that God confined his favour to them, taking pleasure in an *Israelite* for the very name's sake, and rejecting all the rest of mankind) he immediately adds, *that in every nation he that feared God and wrought righteousness, was accepted of him.* This acceptance is usually expressed in scripture, by * *God's being pleased* with men. Now we all know what is intended by the expression of one man's being pleased with another. It denotes an *agreeableness* in the object, something or other that gives pleasure and satisfaction; and for that reason procures the love and good-will of the person pleased in it. The grounds upon which men are pleased with each other are variable, and sometimes quite wrong; but as ¹ *God desireth truth in the inward parts*, so he is pleased with nothing else. This is the only and the immutable object of his delightful regard. But as the best of men are not without sin, nor their virtue perfectly unmixed, the *forgiveness of sin* must always be implied in God's *accepting* any one. The nature of the acceptance must always be determined by the nature of the object. Now the character of the object is that of *sincerity*, not of *perfection*; with
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* Psal. lxxxv. 5. Matt. iii. 17. 1 Cor. x. 5.
† Psal. li. 6.

this sincerity of the upright in heart God is so well pleased, that he beboldeth not iniquity in them, so as to cast them off upon that account; ^m he blots out all their transgressions, receives them graciously, and loves them freely.

2. THE divine acceptance bespeaks a well-pleasedness with our services. Thus ⁿ the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering; to Abel first, and then to his offering, which was the more acceptable for coming out of such pious hands. Therefore the ^o Psalmist saith, *I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.* And hence the expression so often occurs in scripture, of God's *accepting* or not *accepting*, the *sacrifices* presented to him. We may consider *sacrifices* as standing for all other religious services, for the whole of divine worship, every thing done in honour of the Deity. Now it is the happiness of the good man that he ^p can eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a merry heart (in the language of the royal preacher) because God accepteth his works: while ^q the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, the prayer of the upright is his delight. Those that are of a pious disposition of mind, delight to approach God in acts of worship and the exercises of devotion, and God de-
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^m Isa. xliii. 25. ⁿ Hos. xiv. 2, 4. ^o Gen. iv. 4.
^p Psal. xxvi. 6. ^q Eccles. ix 7. ^r Prov. xv. 8.

lights in the addresses they make to him, because he knows their hearts accompany them; God is pleased with their general conversation; *he knoweth the way of the righteous*; so knows as to approve it; the mass of their actions is sanctified by being unfeignedly consecrated to God, and animated by a spirit of true piety; this is true of every part of a virtuous and good behaviour. *The eye of the Lord which is upon the righteous*, follows them in all the paths of common life, and with pleasure observes the care they take in all things to keep a conscience void of offence. Their readiness to communicate to the necessities of the saints, and to the support and encouragement of the cause of God and of religion in the world, and of those that espouse, and manage, and defend it, is, in a peculiar manner, the object of God's favourable regard; these are *the sacrifices with which God is well pleased*. The Apostle Paul therefore tells the *Philippians*, that *he received by Epaphroditus the things which they had sent, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well pleasing to God*. There is a fragrancy in the breathings of a devout soul, more grateful to God than any spices and perfumes that were ever burnt upon his altar; and these inward acts of

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* Psal. i. 6.

* Psal. xxxiv. 15.

* Heb.

xiii. 16.

* Philip. iv. 18.

the mind communicate a value to the outward acts and services of religion which he performs. True christians, as ^w *a holy priesthood, offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* And it is now on order, that having such a mediator and high priest, their prayers and praises come up before God; especially having ^x *presented themselves to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is but their reasonable service.* As to particular duties, or acts of religious service, the degree of their acceptance depends not only upon the general character of the performer, but the temper and disposition of the mind at the very time of performing them, and the care the christian takes to do every thing in the best manner he is able. A devout man may have his fits of indevotion; and those who generally serve God with a reverence and attention of mind, may through neglect, or the interruption of some vain thought or foreign passion, fall into great wanderings and absence of heart, even while they are in the presence of God; the duties performed by them in such a temper, and with so little devotion, cannot be so acceptable to God as those which are otherwise performed; it is well if they are not quite lost, or worse than lost: however this hinders not the acceptableness

^w 1 Pet. ii. 5.^x Rom. xii. 1.

ableness of the good man's *general* temper, nor of the *particular* duties which he discharges in the manner he ought, therefore should only make him more watchful against all those things which have a tendency to untune his heart for the worship of God, and to lessen the pleasure he takes in it.

3. THE *divine acceptance* includes proper testimonies, or marks of both the former, (that is, God's regard to our persons, and well-pleasedness with our services) especially in the final rewards bestowed upon all those *who patiently continue in well-doing.* Good men, in a peculiar manner those who are eminent for goodness, *have this testimony, that they please God.* These marks and evidences of the divine favour, are *present or future.*

IN the *primitive* ages of the world there was a *visible* appearance (called the *presence and glory of the Lord*, and his *face or countenance*) by which God signified his *peculiar residence* in any place, and *approbation* of his faithful servants, and the oblations of prayer and praise which accompanied their sacrifices to him. This glorious *appearance* seems to be intended where God is said to *cause his face to shine*, or to *lift up the light of his countenance* (a mild and refreshing brightness breaking thro' the cloud at such

¹ Rom. ii. 7. ² Heb. xi. 5. ³ Numb. vi. 25.
Psal. xxxi. 16. lxxx. 1. iv. 6.

such times, much as the countenance of a man is lightened up when he is more than ordinarily pleased :) to this reference seems to be had by the writer of the *Hebrews*, when he saith, ^a *that by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; probably, by a light that shone upon the offerer himself from the Shecinah, or cloud of glory; and at the same time by a fire that consumed his sacrifice.* And so when Cain complains that he *should be hid from the face of God*, what else can he be supposed to understand, but this symbol or token of the divine presence? Any such testimony of the favour and presence of God as this, is not now to be expected. This visible intercourse of the Deity with mankind before the publication of the gospel began to be very rare, and since that is intirely ceased; however, there want not still such proofs and effects of the love of God, as are very satisfying to those that enjoy them. Tho' God does not discover himself to the *senses* of men, as in ancient times (otherwise than by his works of Creation and Providence) because christians are to live by faith, and not by sight; yet he ^a *sheds abroad his love in their hearts; they know*

^a Heb. xi. 4.
v. 5.

^c Gen. iv. 14.

^d Rom.

know that God accepts them and their offerings, because they have more of *that peace of God which passeth all understanding*; because by *waiting on God they renew their strength*; are better able to encounter with, and to overcome those temptations with which they are assaulted, and are better prepared to discharge all those duties that are incumbent on them: every duty, and grace and virtue is rewarded by an increase in the same kind, and that by a *brighter light in the mind*, a *greater establishment of the heart*, a *more uninterrupted peace*; *more abundant hopes*, and more lively perceptions of *mental pleasure and satisfaction*; and thus their own regularity, and faithfulness, and devotion on the one hand, and the evidences of the divine approbation, have a mutual good influence upon one another; and hereby, as well as by other means, their perseverance in the ways of piety is secured, so that being *faithful to the death*, they receive a *crown of life*; which, as I may say, raises the proof of God's being pleased with them into a *demonstration*; for certainly there cannot be the least room to doubt, not so much as the least possibility of it, that *God accepts us*, when all the effects of his displeasure for sin are entirely removed, and infinite goodness overflows upon the soul, and fills it to the utmost

most of its capacities. He that makes us perfectly happy, and gives us assurance of our continuing so to eternity, must needs have accepted us. If this does not prove his acceptance of us, nothing can. ^d *I am the almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect :* (are the words of God to *Abraham*) now when after having walked before God in this life, and been perfect, according to the nature of the present state, *Abraham* and all other good men shall stand in the presence of God, and be convinced in the most agreeable manner of his being the almighty, or all-sufficient God, by that perfection of beatitude and glory to which he will advance them. The same thing which proves the almighty power of God, will likewise serve to demonstrate their acceptance in his sight; their great solicitude having been so to behave, ^e *that whether present or absent they might be accepted of him.* He will not fail to accept them while present in the body, but much more when absent from it, and in the most conspicuous and distinguishing manner of all at the resurrection of the just, when every perfect soul shall be united to a glorified body, and all the pious servants of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, shall join with the innumerable multitude of the heavenly hosts, to compose one vast and
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^d Gen. xvii. 1.^e Cor. v. 8, 9.

glorious assembly which shall never be dissolved, or be less happy to eternity, but if possible, rather receive further improvements of knowledge and felicity, by the experience of succeeding and everlasting ages. Will it not then be evident to the whole world, that *all that do well are accepted of God*; ^h that *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, and designed nothing so much in all the dispensations of his Providence as promoting it, and thereby fitting and qualifying his reasonable creatures for the highest degrees of happiness of which they are capable?

IV. THE last Proposition contained in the words *absolutely* considered, is, that men can have no reasonable hope of being *accepted of God* in any other way than this of *well-doing*. If *thou doest not well* (saith God to Cain) *sin lieth at the door*; and there will lie as an everlasting bar to thy admission into my favour, unless it be removed by true repentance and amendment of life. *Believing well* alone will not do. And by *believing well*, I mean having a *right* notion of the great doctrines of christianity, being *persuaded* of the truth of them, and *declaring* our faith to the world. Be it granted that our *faith* is so far right; yet if it does not produce answerable

^a *Pr. xi. 7.*

effects, if our *lives* be not *christian* as well as our *belief* it will not do. The main use of *faith* is to direct the conversation, to *purify the heart*, to refine and animate the affections. *Truth* without *holiness* is a thing too maimed and imperfect to please God; an essential part is wanting. And if *believing well* is not sufficient, *talking well* will not mend the matter. In this sense, *tho' I had the tongue of angels*, so that I could raise the minds of others to heaven, and fire their hearts with a holy zeal for God and religion, if all the while my own soul cleave to the earth, and I feel nothing of that sacred warmth, that love to God and holiness, which I know how to describe so well, and was the instrument of conveying into the breasts of others, it will profit me nothing. And what then can there be *acceptable* in the common nauseous cant of hypocrites to a holy God? He can never be pleased with that which offends all sensible and sober-minded men. Those in whom we see none of the substantial virtues of a good life, may talk as devoutly as they will, make use of a *peculiar set of phrases*, and boast of their *experiences in religion*, all that know what true religion is, and practise it in sincerity, only think the worse of them for it, and cannot choose but have a generous indignation raised in their breasts, when they consider how much

much religion suffers in its reputation by the ignorance and conceit, and gross hypocrisy of such vain pretenders. This *believing* and *talking well* is not *well-doing*; and tho' they may be too often substituted in the room of it by men, will not be accepted in lieu of it by God; no, he always looks upon persons and things as they are, so that what is not *really* religion will never pass in his judgment for such. And therefore we may add, it would be of no advantage to us, in respect of God, tho' we had the art of imposing upon the world, with the appearance of *doing well*, when there was not the thing itself. ¹ *The form of godliness without the power of it*, were it so cunningly managed as to deceive the most wary and careful observers (which it seldom or never is) would only meet with a ^k suitable reward; that is, a reward as empty of true happiness, as a mere outside of religion, is of true solid goodness. For the same reason that a man of real integrity, one that in the *general* course of his life, and not only now and then by fits, in *secret*, and not in *publick* only, under *temptation* as well as in the *absence* of it, *does well* and delights in doing it; for the same reason I say, as one of this character is *accepted of God*, (because his nature is in some degree conformed to the di-

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¹ 2 Tim. iii. 5.^k Matt. vi. 2.

vine nature, and his will to the divine will; and his life to the divine commands) all those of a *contrary* character can reasonably expect no other than to be rejected by him. The love of holiness is inseparably connected with the hatred of sin; and as the love of holiness is attended with a delight in those that are holy (proportionably to the degree in which they are so) the hatred of sin must needs be followed with the displeasure and indignation of God against the impenitent sinner. It is therefore said, ¹ that *God hateth all the workers of iniquity*, i. e. with a hatred of *disapprobation*; he hates that which is their prevailing character, and for which he will punish them, if they repent not, ^m *with everlasting destruction from his presence, and the glory of his power.* No longer therefore ⁿ *flatter yourselves in your own eyes* (you that do evil, instead of doing well) *till your iniquity is found to be hateful in the eyes of God.* Believe it nothing will do but being inwardly and outwardly, universally and constantly, in judgment and inclination, in profession and practice, holy and good. *Do well and thou shalt fare well, for* ^o *verily it shall be well with the righteous.* This is as certain as that there is a God that judgeth in the earth, ^p *who will render to every man according*

¹ Psal. v. 5. ^m 2 Thess. i. 9. ⁿ Psal. xxxvi.
² ^o Psal. lviii. 11. ^p Rom. ii. 6—

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to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; while to every one that worketh good, he distributes glory, honour, and peace, there being no respect of persons with God.

THE truth and importance of these things will be more clearly seen under the *second* general head, but this must be reserved for another Discourse.



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S E R M O N XV.

The certainty of being accepted of
God in well-doing.

GEN. iv. 7.

*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be
accepted?*

IN the foregoing Discourse I observed that these words contain a very important meaning, whether we consider them *absolutely*—or with *relation* to the *speaker*—the *person* to whom they were spoken, or the *occasion* of them. I have considered their import when *absolutely* taken, and shown them to include these *four* most concerning truths, which I explained and proved.

I. MEN know, or may know, that there is such a thing as *doing well* in a moral and religious sense, and what it is.

II. MEN

II. MEN are not under an absolute incapacity of *doing well*. God has not laid them under any such incapacity, whatever they have done as to themselves by their wilful neglects and transgressions.

III. IN *well-doing* men know that they *shall be accepted of God*. This question, *Shalt thou not be accepted?* implies so much. Hast thou any good reason to think otherwise, or even to doubt it? Thou hast not.

IV. MEN can have no reasonable hope of being *accepted of God* in any other way than this of *well-doing*. *Believing well*, or *talking well* will not be *accepted* in the room of *doing well*. *Do well*, and thou shalt *fare well*, for verily there is a reward for the righteous; but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish remain for every soul that doth evil.—To proceed with our subject, I observe

2. THE words of the Text may be considered with relation to the *speaker*, who is no other than God himself. *The Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* It is God that saith this; God who is the greatest and the best of all Beings, infinite in all perfection. And therefore

I. THESE words must be spoken with the *utmost sincerity*, it being infinitely beneath the majesty, as well as holiness of God, to use words of falshood and deceit, when he condescends to talk with his creatures. And if the words were *sincerely* spoken, then they mean all that they were shown to do, in explaining their *absolute* sense, *viz.* that the *knowledge* and *practice* of their duty, and the *attainment* of the *rewards* of *well-doing* (implied in being *accepted of God*) are *possible* all to men. Whoever speaks *sincerely* uses words in their natural and obvious meaning, and that in which the person they are addressed to, must be supposed to understand them; not in a sense which they cannot be made to bear without violence, because words do not answer the end of language, when they are used after this manner; the original design of language being to convey the real sentiments and intentions of the speaker to the hearer, not to give him an apprehension of them quite remote from the truth. Speech instead of being a blessing and benefit to mankind, would be a very great mischief and inconvenience, if it were always or generally thus misapplied. Upon this account *sincerity* is a fundamental duty in society, it is expected by all, and practised by all who are lovers of virtue; and
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much more then by God, the fountain and standard of all moral perfection, with whose idea the least degree or even shadow of evil is absolutely incompatible. Nothing can be more dishonourable than the supposition of his *revealing one thing, and intending another*. To assert this as some have done, and then call it a *holy dissimulation* (however innocent their meaning might be) is *reproaching* the Deity, and from one that knew and considered the consequence of what he said, would be *impious blasphemy*. Have the same words one meaning when they are used by the adorable majesty of heaven and of earth, and another when they are used by those of his creatures who have any regard to their reputation, as men of simplicity and godly sincerity, lovers of truth? *God forbid*—we should think less worthily of him than we do of one another. It is the glory of the Deity *that he cannot lie*, that he can no more *say what is false* at the time of speaking it (being contrary to his real thoughts and intentions) than he can *falsify his word afterwards*. Among the children of men, frail and imperfect as they are, great numbers are to be found who have an aversion to lying, and could not be reconciled to it, were the temptation never so great; but let *God be true, tho' all men were liars*; he can have

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no temptation to use this method, being able to accomplish all his designs without it. And shall the ever-blessed God do that without any temptation, which many of his creatures would abhor doing upon the greatest? The very supposition is shocking to a sober mind. Nor does it make any great difference, when the expressions, tho' not directly *false*, are yet *equivocal*, and intended in another sense than they *naturally* suggested. *If thou doest well*, that is, *saith one*, "not in a truly spiritual and religious sense, but ceremonially and outwardly *well*, *shalt thou not be accepted?*" that is, not intitled to the special favour of God, not so accepted as to be rewarded in the life to come, but only so as to be favoured with the blessings of this *life*." But by what authority dare any one thus restrain and stint the meaning of the words, when there is nothing in the words themselves, or in the circumstances of the case to countenance it? Nay, when both these (that is the words themselves, and the circumstances attending them) oblige us to give them quite another interpretation? Since in propriety of speech, and in the language of scripture, he only *does well* with relation to his general conduct, or the right discharge of particular duties, who is *good*, and *does good*, not only in *appearance*, but upon *principle*; and one of this character only

ly is in favour with God, and accepted of him. And further, how was it that *Abel did well*? And in what sense was he accepted? Is there any room to doubt that *Abel* was a truly good man, one that presented himself to God, as well as brought of the firstlings of his flock to him; not only sacrificing, but living by faith, without which his sacrifice had not been more excellent than that of *Cain*? Is it not expressly said, that ^b *his works were righteous*? In this case, when God said to *Cain*, *if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted*, Could *Cain* understand the intent or meaning of the words to be any other than this? "If thou doest well, as thy brother *Abel* has done, shalt thou not be accepted as he is? Is there any other foundation of the difference that I make between you, than the difference there is in your two characters? Were thy temper and behaviour the same as his, thy reward should be the same." And when God reasons thus with a guilty criminal, 'tis a high reflection upon the Deity, to imagine that he only insults him, and upbraids him in words, which at bottom have no real meaning in them, or not that meaning which they naturally and evidently imply. As therefore we have any reverence for the Deity, let us not call in question the sincerity of any of his

his exhortations, commands, declarations, or promises, but venture our souls upon them, as we safely may, and by the *goodness* of God so plainly expressed in his word, be encouraged to *be good*; and to *do good* ourselves, nothing further being necessary on our part to this end than that we *sincerely* endeavour it.

2. GOD saith this who is all-wise, all-powerful, all-gracious, and immutably faithful and therefore we are sure that as the words are exactly agreeable to the will and intention of the *speaker*, so the *event* shall fully answer the most significant meaning of the words. In these words, *if thou doest well*, is there a *promise* implied of divine *assistance* in order to our doing all that is required of us? This *assistance* shall be certainly afforded us; and our concurrence being supposed, shall prove effectual; for God, who has promised, is both able and faithful to perform his word. Being unchangeable in himself *he cannot* ^c *alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth*; nor being almighty, meet with such difficulties as his grace is not easily able to surmount; ^d *his grace shall be sufficient* for all those who do not receive it in vain. Let us do what we can, and he will enable us to do what else we could not; he will begin a good work in us, and what he

^c Psal. lxxxix. 34.

^d 2 Cor. xii. 9.

he begins *“he will perfect”*; the power and faithfulness of God, will not let us doubt of it. Does God say, *if thou doest well?* The reason is, that he loves we should *do well*; nothing can be more pleasing to his goodness, as well as holiness, which takes the greatest pleasure in our leading a holy and good life now, as the condition and means of our being happy for ever. And O what a powerful motive does this consideration carry in it, to make us set about the performance of our duty, and to persevere in it! The divine goodness has something exceedingly attractive to all ingenuous minds into which it insinuates itself by degrees, subduing and captivating them more and more to its gracious dictates. In this expression of being *accepted of God*, have we a prospect given us of very great advantages now, and of a glorious reward after death? The prospect is not *vain*, nor the hope *groundless*. That God to whom all power belongs, can fulfil our biggest expectations, and will do it as far as they are built upon his promise, being as *faithful* in accomplishing his promises as he is *sincere* in making them. Let us unfeignedly give ourselves to him, and not at any time repent of what we have done, and he will never repent of any engagements he has laid himself under to

to us; but after he has guided us by his counsel, protected us by his Providence, and sanctified and assisted us by his *grace* in this world, will in the next crown our wishes to the height, and fill our hearts with everlasting joy. He will do this, not merely for the sake of his *word*, which he will keep inviolably, but to gratify his *own unbounded goodness*, which, unless it meets with resistance from the invincible obstinacy and ingratitude of his creatures, delights to diffuse itself in all the variety and kinds of good things, which his infinite power can produce, and the capacities of the creature will admit of. And what then is wanting to give the motives of religion a kind of irresistible force? Certainly nothing to those who seriously consider them. It is certain that I shall be holy now, and happy for ever, if I only set myself in earnest to the work which God has given me to do; the divine power, faithfulness and goodness, all conspire to complete my assurance of this.

“ Nothing therefore (let every one say for
 “ himself) shall prevail with me, under
 “ one foolish pretence or other, to indulge
 “ my sloth, and delay *doing well*. Rely-
 “ ing upon the *grace* of God to prosper
 “ my sincere, though weak endeavours,
 “ and hoping for that *life and immortality*
 “ which are brought to light by the Gospel, I
 “ will

“ will from henceforth, if I have not yet
 “ done it, make religion my business, and
 “ if I have, will make it more so than
 “ ever.” There must undoubtedly be a
 very great pleasure in *doing well*, when be-
 sides the approbation it will procure me
 from my own mind, I consider how ac-
 ceptable I shall hereby become to the most
 excellent, the most powerful, the most gra-
 cious, and the most beneficent of all Be-
 ings.

3. THESE words will appear to be very
 remarkable if we proceed to the *last* thing
 proposed, *viz.* the consideration of the *per-*
son to whom, and the *occasion* on which they
 were spoken.—Let us consider these *two*
 distinctly.

I. THE *person* to whom these words were
 directed was *Cain*, a very bad man, indeed
 one of the worst of men, who has this
 brand of infamy set upon him in scripture,
 that he ^f *was of the wicked one*, (that is, a
 child of the devil whom he imitated) *and*
slew his brother. Our blessed Saviour charges
 the Jews ^e *with being of their father the devil*,
 because they did his will; (in going about
 to kill him) *for the devil was a murderer*
from the beginning; upon the same account
Cain is said to be *of that wicked one*, being
 his

^f 1 Johh iii. 12.

^e John viii. 44

his first-born son. That apostate Spirit was a *murtherer*, by tempting our first parents to disobey the command of God, and thereby introducing sin and death into the world; in this *first parent*, as it were, murthuring all mankind that descended from him. Him *Cain* followed when he took away his *brother's* life, and therein set an example to after generations; in every one of which too many have always gone in the way of *Cain*. *Murther* is a most unnatural sin, *fratricide* one of the most unnatural kinds of *murther*; so that both the heinous nature of the sin of which *Cain* was guilty, and his being the *first* of mankind that led the way in it; and further, his committing this wickedness in the beginning, when there were so few persons in the world, and very probably there had not been as yet one single instance of even a natural death in the human species; all these concur to aggravate the sin of *Cain*, and to blacken his character. It is very true, he had not yet committed the *murther* when these words were spoken, but it is plain that he was a *murtherer in his heart*, and that God knew it, who accordingly gives him this kind check, that he might not suffer his passions to hurry him any further. And we may add this as another aggravation of his wickedness, that after having had so fair warning from his Maker himself, he

he rushes on to the perpetration of one of the most horrid crimes that ever was. Now from this character of the person to whom these words were spoken, as one of the *chief of sinners*, I would infer, that *none* are excluded from mercy who truly *repent* of their sins, (that is, *cease to do evil, and learn to do well*) and that *repentance* is not impossible to the *greatest* of sinners. The crime indeed was not yet finished in the outward act, but (according to that decision of our Saviour, *ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment*; according to this way of reasoning I say) he had a great deal of the guilt of it lying upon him, since his anger raged so terribly, that notwithstanding all that is here said to cool it, he could not rest till he had dispatched his brother out of this world. *He that searches the hearts of all men*, knew perfectly well what was in the heart of this man; he knew him to be a person of no piety, and therefore rejected his sacrifice; and he knew the wicked disposition he was in towards his brother, which made him condescend to speak as he

^a Matt. v. 21, 22.

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does in order to pacify him. And if (notwithstanding *Cain* so little deserved it) God yet takes this gracious method with him, and expostulates the matter in such gentle and convincing language, as we may be sure that God did not *desire the death of Cain*, so likewise that he doth not *delight in the death of any sinner* whatsoever. Here is a very bad man, who in all probability lived and died in his sins; and if he did so, cannot be supposed to be *absolutely elected* to eternal life, being a *son of perdition*; and yet this bad man, this *son of perdition*, as he afterwards proved, is called to repentance. It is not therefore necessary to any man's repentance that he • be *absolutely elected*. Whether there be such an *absolute decree* or no, it cannot be designed to the disadvantage of any. If there be a *decree* (for which I see no foundation in scripture) that renders the salvation of a *certain number necessary*, yet it is undeniable that there can be no such *decree* as makes the salvation of all besides *impossible*; because then they would not be so kindly and so earnestly invited to comply with the terms of acceptance. *Cain* might have done well, and should have been accepted if he had; *Cain*, who was a first-rate sinner and a *reprobate* of his own making. Therefore those who have been *accustomed to do evil*, may, if they will set them-

themselves to it, *learn to do well*; if they repent not, they will have none to charge but themselves; and if they repent, they shall certainly be saved.—What an encouragement is this to all those who are any way inclined to return unto God, from whom they have wickedly departed? Are you willing to be reconciled to God? Doubt not of his readiness to be reconciled unto you. But you have been such great sinners that you *despair of mercy*. But why so, when *Cain* might have obtained it? And I hope you are not worse than *Cain*.—But though *to will* is present with you, yet how *to do* that which is good you know not; you are quite out of heart when you think of the difficulties you must break through, and the temptations you must overcome. The answer is easy; your business is to strive, and if you strive and continue so doing, you may safely trust to the *grace* of God, that it shall not be in vain. Cherish the good disposition you find in yourselves, beg of God to confirm and increase it by his *grace*, till it is fixed into a firm resolution, and a prevailing inclination to lead a holy and virtuous life; and above all things, be sure by sinful omissions or commissions, not to lose the ground you have gotten. And methinks whatever our present inclinations are, when we are called to think of this

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instance of the goodness of God to so great a sinner as Cain, it should produce an alteration in us, and turn our hearts towards God, if they did not point that way before. One would think the most hardened and ungrateful souls should be affected and melted with such an example as this, and repenting of their evil deeds, should resolve to try whether it be not possible for them to do better.

2. THE occasion of these words was the envy and displeasure of Cain upon his brother's being preferred before him, as we learn from the history foregoing; where we are told that Cain having brought of the fruit of the ground, an offering unto the Lord; and so likewise Abel of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof; the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering he had not respect. Hereupon Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, *Why are thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* So St. John tells us, that the reason why Cain slew his brother was, that ¹ his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous; that is, the different characters of these two brothers was the ground of a like difference in the tokens and effects of the divine favour towards

consequi.

! 1 John iii. 12.

wards them, and this the source of that envy and hatred, which nothing else would appease but a brother's blood. From whence we learn on the one hand, the *dreadful nature and effects* of envy, and on the other hand, the *great unreasonableness* of this vice. — *Envy* is a most cruel and implacable passion, not more troublesome to the bosom in which it dwells, than it is dangerous to those that are the objects of it, when it rises to a considerable degree, and possesses persons that have no honour or conscience in them. What was it but *envy*, that made the devil plot the destruction of our *first parents*, and of their posterity since, and was perhaps, the occasion of his ejection out of heaven? What but *envy* sold *Joseph* into *Egypt*; nailed the *Lord of life and glory* to a *cross*, and has been, and still is, the foundation of the most bitter animosities and irreconcilable breaches and differences, not only in the *world* where it is not so much to be wondered at, but in the *church* of God too, where surely it ought not to have any sanctuary allowed it, and where notwithstanding, it generally meets with too much encouragement? This passion grows out of self-love, and the desire of esteem and preheminance, which is so natural to mankind: from hence is the temptation to *envy*; all that we think stand in our way,

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and eclipse us, or that have any injoyment
and advantage that we want, while we ap-
prehend ourselves to have as good a title to
it as they, if not a better. This shows
the necessity of watching the first motions
of this dangerous enemy, and opposing and
guarding against them, which is more easily
done in the beginning than when the pas-
sion has gotten head, and has beat down all
the guards of reason and equity before it.
If we value our own peace, or the quiet
and order of the world, or the favour of
almighty God, and would have that appro-
bation from God and man, which is the
chief motive to *envy*, we should think our-
selves nearly concerned to keep our breasts
as free as possibly we can from this mischie-
vous, this base, this dishonourable passion,
which is not more common than it is unrea-
sonable. Many considerations might be men-
tioned to shew its *unreasonableness*. I shall
confine myself to that which the Text sug-
gests to us; *viz.* that *the divine favour is*
open to every one; and therefore no man can
have any reason to *envy* another upon any
account whatsoever; for let us reflect a little
upon what it is we ground our *envy*. Is it
upon the score of any *natural gifts or accom-*
plishments that we *envy* another? Not to
observe that God, as the God of nature,
can owe his creatures nothing, nor do them
any

any wrong by with-holding from one what he gives to another, this consideration, that *if we do well we shall be accepted*, is abundantly enough, not only to silence our complaints, but to teach us to be contented and thankful. If we fall short of others in *natural* abilities, yet as to the *graces* of the *Spirit*, and the *virtues* of a good life, it is our own fault if we come behind in any good thing. Is another man the object of envy, because the *favours* of Providence are more largely heaped upon him? And is not God, as the supreme Lord and proprietor of all things in heaven and earth, at liberty to distribute these outward blessings in what measure and proportion he pleases? And may any one upon this account presume to say to him, *What doest thou?* But not to insist upon this, only consider that *thy acceptance with God*, which is the main thing of all, does not depend upon thy having *more* or *less* of the world, but upon thy *doing well*; and thou mayest *do well* in any condition of life; to *do well* being nothing else but to fear God, and to glorify and serve him, according to the opportunities which the circumstances thou art placed in afford thee for it. As for the *gifts of nature* and the *bounties* of Providence, God dispenses them as a sovereign *who giveth no account of his matters*; but in conferring the *rewards* of the *future*

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state, he acts as a righteous judge, who will
render to every man according as his works
have been. It is not he that has been great,
or powerful, or rich, or learned that shall
be honoured in that day; but he that has
lived conformably to the will of God, and
made a right use and improvement of his
abilities whatever they have been. And
why then should any one be *envious at the
prosperity of the wicked*, which will profit
them nothing in the day of God's wrath?
If those that prosper are *good men*, we should
rejoice to see power and riches lodged in
such good hands. But, perhaps, this is the
very thing that provokes my *envy*, that my
neighbour is a *better man* than myself, and
for that reason more in favour with God,
My *envy* has the same rise as that of *Cain*
to *Abel*. But can any thing be imagined
more unreasonable than this? If another
man is *accepted of God* and I am not,
whose fault is that but my own, who if I
did well, should be *accepted* as he is? Let
me be excited to *emulation* by the good ex-
amples that are before me; if I will, let
me strive to come up with them in the
christian course, this is a commendable pas-
sion; but let me not, instead of endeavour-
ing to get higher myself, with them lower,
and hate them, and speak evil of them, and
do them ill offices for the sake of that which

pro-

procures them the love and approbation of their maker, and should therefore recommend them to those of their fellow-creatures too. In this respect, as well as others, it will appear at last, that the *ways of God are equal*, but that *ours are unequal*. That God should give the preference to those who keep his commandments, and make the best use of their powers and faculties, is the most equal thing in the whole world; and consequently, that we should be displeased with him for doing this, or angry with those who are the objects of his favour, must be acknowledged to be altogether as unequal and unreasonable. Indeed, were it so that God admitted some into his peculiar favour and excluded others, without any difference at all in the conduct and behaviour of the persons themselves, the temptation to *envy* would be more plausible, and the absurdity of it not so easily to be shown. But this is not the case; the prize is proposed to all; all without distinction are invited to aspire to the favour of God, and to glory, honour, and immortality, as the consequence of that. And let us but exert ourselves in the best manner that we can, and *run the race that is set before us*, we shall certainly obtain the glorious and eternal recompence of reward. Wherefore, instead of *envying* others for their goodness or happiness, let us mind this
one

one thing, to be good ourselves, and to be growing still better and better, and then consider how happy we shall be in time and to eternity.

LET me now Apply the whole in an earnest *Exhortation* to you to do well, which I need not enforce with any other motive than that in the Text, of your being in that case *accepted of God*. Methinks *doing well* is a thing that should recommend itself. If there be any thing more excellent in an active Being than an unactive one, or any thing valuable in active powers, that which makes them so must be the supposition of their being applied to doing good: better have no powers and faculties at all, than employ them wrong. No actions are better than evil ones; and no power to act at all, rather to be chosen, than a power to do well without doing it. In *well-doing* only we can please God or ourselves, answer the end of our creation, or attain the end and scope of all our endeavours, which is to be happy. The sinner must wander as necessarily, and as wide from the way of true happiness, as the traveller miss his road in a vast uninhabited wilderness, that refuses the direction of a guide, and wilfully shuts his eyes that he may not see it himself. But now only do well and thou shalt be happy,
for

for thou shalt be *accepted of God*; and nothing can be necessary to thy happiness more than this. Man is naturally an ambitious creature; and how can any ambition fly at a higher mark than the approbation of the Almighty? If God be the greatest of all Beings, must not the true greatness of other Beings consist in their resembling God? Which they do in the noblest manner by being holy as he is holy. Man is likewise a lover of himself; he unavoidably pursues his own happiness, or what he thinks so. My friends, I am not persuading you to any such impossible thing as extinguishing this natural affection. Love yourselves as much as you please, so you love yourselves in a right manner. Upon this supposition you cannot be guilty of excess. The object of self-love is self-happiness. And from whom shall you seek for happiness but from God? Where but in him? Happiness, let it spring from what enjoyments soever it will, must be the gift of God, who is the most high possessor of heaven and earth. To be *accepted of God* therefore must be the surest and the shortest way to happiness. He is infinitely wise, so perfectly acquainted with the natures he has given us, and with the nature of all other things, that he cannot possibly mistake in his judgment of the chief and final

final happiness of man: and as his *wisdom* is infinite, so likewise his *power*; there is no end which his *wisdom* can propose, and no means for the accomplishment of any end which the same *wisdom* can contrive, but his *power*, without any difficulty or hazard of miscarrying, is able to command. Our duty and our interest therefore lie in a little compass. * *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.* He that is *accepted of God* is as sure to be happy, completely and eternally happy, as he is that God can make him so.

I SHALL therefore conclude, after I have desired you to carry this one thing further in your remembrance, that as you are *accepted in well-doing*, so it is through *Jesus Christ*, agreeably to the very words of scripture, that ¹ *God has made us accepted in the beloved.* *Christ* is the *beloved son of God*, most beloved of God, because he is most like him. By him he has given us the most abundant means and assistances for our sanctification, and continual progress towards perfection, and thro' his all-perfect sacrifice and prevailing intercession, he *accepts* us imperfect as we are, and our poor services to *life eternal*. Let this

* Eccles. xii. 13.

¹ Ephes. i. 6.

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this teach and encourage us both in the discharge of our duty, and the expectation of our reward, *to look unto Jesus, ^m thro' whom we can do all things* necessary to our serving God acceptably now, and enjoying him for ever.

^m Phil. iv. 13.



SER.



S E R M O N XVI.

The advantage of a religious life
in point of certainty, beauty,
worth, and pleasantness.

PROV. iv. 18.

*But the path of the just is as the
shining light, that shineth more
and more unto the perfect day.*

AS in travelling through a country there are different ways leading to very different ends, so it is in human life. No two paths can be more unlike and opposite one to the other, than those of *moral wisdom* and *folly*, or of *virtue* and *vice*; and were we to form our judgment by numbers, we should conclude the ways of sin were rather to be chosen than the ways of religion, it being undeniably certain, that

that the *many* (it is to be feared by far the greater part of mankind) go in the *broad way*.

Solomon himself, notwithstanding that extraordinary degree of wisdom which he had received from heaven, had either shamefully mistaken his way through the influence of his sensual passions, by which he was blinded ; or being hurried away by the violence of them, had knowingly gone wrong. The sacred Historian has recorded this strange instance of human frailty for a warning to all ages, that in the midst of so many temptations as surround them on all sides, (those persons especially who are in high places and plentiful circumstances) and with so strong a party within them, men might never think themselves safe whatever talents and abilities they possessed, but in the exercise of the greatest vigilance and circumspection, and under the protection of divine *grace*. In order to make all the satisfaction in his power for the dishonour he had done to God and religion by his bad example, being returned, it is probable, from his wanderings, he offers himself for a guide to others, and in his writings makes use of all his wisdom and eloquence to recommend and promote the cause of virtue, which he had now espoused. This he does in the book of *Proverbs*, and in this chapter particularly,
in

in which, insinuating his instructions as the affectionate advice of a *father* to his *son*, to whose welfare all his aims and wishes were directed, he tells his reader, that *he had taught him in the way of wisdom, and had led him in right paths*, verses 10, 11. so that as long as he kept to this way he had nothing to fear, but would have reason to be intirely easy, and satisfied, and be able to pursue the glorious end before him with the swiftest motion, and without danger of falling. For this is the meaning of the 12th verse; *when thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitned, and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.* Therefore, ver. 13. *take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life.* A man certainly runs himself into many inconveniencies by disregarding the rules of *common prudence*, but still he may come off well enough as to the main point; his chief and noblest interest may not be exposed to any hazard, as it is when he neglects the instructions of *heavenly wisdom*; here *life* or *death* is the issue, an error here, if not timely perceived and corrected, is fatal and irrecoverable.

THIS being so, it is no wonder the wise author of this book is so earnest in his persuasions to all men (with whom his judgment and advice were likely to be of any weight)

weight) not to join in society with men of a vicious character, nor to imitate their conduct, and that he uses such a variety of expressions, all of them to the same purpose; *enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away*, ver. 14, 15. The vast importance of the case, and his affectionate concern for the persons interested, least they should chuse wrong, were the true reasons of his employing so many words more than were necessary to explain his meaning.—As a further preservative against the vices and company of such men, he observes the *injustice and violence*, to which, sooner or later, they are led by a wicked course of life. It may be, they begin only with *intemperance*; but it is seldom they stop there; to *intemperance* they add *ungodliness*; and to *ungodliness*, *unrighteousness*. They first *wrong themselves*, then *despise God*; and at last having wasted their consciences within, and their substance without, they make no scruple of invading the rights of other men, that they may be able to maintain the expence to which their lusts put them; *they sleep not except they have done mischief*; and *their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall*. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence, verses 16, 17: such is the character

and the *path* of sinners; their character *hateful*, their path *dangerous* and *destructive*; in opposition to both which, and because *contraries* are best illustrated by each other, he sets before us in the words of the Text, a most lively representation of *virtue* and *virtuous* men. *But the path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

By the *just* are not meant such as *merely* abstain from doing *unjust* things to their neighbour, while in other respects they manifest an open contempt of the rules of virtue and religion; the *justice* of such men is no real virtue, no commendation at all *morally* considered, being the sole effect of a happy natural temper, or of worldly views, and therefore cannot deserve to have such things said of it as are here mentioned in praise of the *just* man, and to express his happiness above all others: no; the *just* man is he, and he alone, to whom the same character belongs that is given of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, that they were *righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.* This man is *righteous before God*, or in his sight, who cannot be deceived with the empty appearance of a thing instead of the reality. Whoever is *righteous before God*, is *inwardly righteous*; he has a vital principle of religion in his heart, and this

^a Luke i. 6.

this principle is prevailing; *he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity*, which no man can do who is not *blameless* in respect of *all the commandments of God*; allowance being made for human infirmities, he may not, he does not presumptuously offend against any one command, but he is sincere and upright in his obedience to all. He never inquires which is the *great commandment*, imagining or hoping, that there may be one or more of the divine commands of such superiour excellence to all the rest, that if he keep these, he need not be solicitous for any thing further; he does not wish for any such dispensation or license as this, to break the *least* of God's commandments; as he very well knows the thing in itself is the highest absurdity: he considers that there is such a thing as *justice towards God*, more properly so called than any other virtue that goes under that name, consisting in *love* to God, and *obedience* as proceeding from *love*; that this *justice* is really the chief original and foundation of that we owe to our fellow-creatures, since their *rights* are only *derivative*, but his *independent* and *supreme*: they could have nothing were it not given them of God, either by natural descent or in the course of his Providence; and whatever God has given them, other men are obliged to leave them in quiet possession

of, because it is his sovereign will that they should do so, *who distributeth to all men severally as he pleases*, and giveth to one man the use of some things, to another of others, to one of more, to another of less, reserving the lordship and prerogative of all things to himself; so that *injustice* to men is still greater *injustice* to God, and is so esteemed by the *just* man, who being righteous towards God cannot be unrighteous in his dealings with men, whether *positively* or *negatively* so, for there is a *negative* as well as a *positive* unrighteousness, signifying our not doing what we ought to do. I shall add further concerning the righteousness of the truly *just* man, that as it regulates his *own actions* in his commerce with other men, so likewise the *judgment* which he forms of *theirs*, keeping him at least impartial, if it does not incline him (as it does where it has its perfect work) to take the more *charitable* side in all doubtful cases. Nor is this all; for the *just* man being mindful to render to God the things that are God's, doth not content himself with practising universal righteousness towards his fellow-creatures, but is moreover *temperate* in all things; he observes the rules of *sobriety*, because they are also rules of *prudence*; that is, because the health of his body, and the freedom and serenity of his mind, together with

with other considerations of the like nature, require it; but this is not the *only* or *chief* reason, for his living soberly; but that if he did otherwise, he should be *unjust to God*, from whom he has received his Being, his faculties, his outward enjoyments, which therefore he cannot abuse, without being guilty of the greatest *ingratitude*; that is, of the worst sort of *injustice* towards his maker. Hence it appears, that *universal goodness* is implied in the character of the *just* man, of whom the Text makes mention; and that it is with the greatest propriety and fitness that the whole compass of our duty is represented under the notion of *justice*, since whatever the immediate object of any duty be, and whatever name or title it pass under in respect of that object, it is no other than *strict justice* towards God; upon which account, no person can be truly godly, that does not live *soberly* and *righteously* in the world, or be sober and righteous in a *moral* and *christian* sense, who does not live godly. Let this suffice as to the persons characterised in the Text; they are called the *just*; by whom are meant men of an *upright heart*, and of a constant and inflexible *integrity* in their behaviour.

THE *path* of such (or the course of their lives, their passage through time into eternity) is like the *shining light*, either of the

morning-star, which is welcome for its own light, but more as the promise of approaching day; or of the *morning-sun*, which before it is seen, creates the twilight; then after its appearance above the horizon, darts its direct rays, ascending higher and higher in the heavens, and as it ascends, encreasing in its heat and splendour, till it has reached its noon, where it is beheld in its full glory. The *latter* of these is most probably understood by the *shining light*; and I shall accordingly handle my subject with allusion to that, taking notice however of one thing suggested by the *former* similitude, *viz.* that as the *morning-star* has but a feeble light compared to that of the day, yet being the certain fore-runner of it is the more valued on that account; so the *light* of a *holy life*, imperfect as it is in comparison of the eternal fountain of life and glory, is an earnest to the soul of the heavenly illumination, which (as day-light does the world) cheers and quickens all its powers, and answers those ends for which the *morning-star* of virtue was not sufficient. ^b *To the upright there ariseth light in darkness; God lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, bestows upon them the marks of his special favour, and either never hides his face from them, or hides it only that they*

^b Psal. cxii, 4

may seek it the more earnestly. But thinking it enough to have just mentioned this, I shall now proceed to consider the several *advantages* of a religious life that are plainly hinted by the comparison here used, of such a life to the *light of the morning-star*, which shineth *brightly* at first, but *more and more unto the perfect day*.

I. THE *path of the just*, or a holy and religious life, is fitly resembled to the *light*, for the *certainty* and *evidence* it carries along with it. The good man knows himself to be in the right; he sees both his way and his end; in the path of his duty he is never without light, which produces a conviction and acquiescence of mind as to the course he has chosen. The sinner cannot say so; if he be certain of any thing, it is that he is wrong, that he is out of the way which God commands him to walk in, and which reason approves, and that while he is wandering from this way, he shall never find that rest and happiness he is seeking after. I say, if the sinner has any certainty at all it is of this; for no other evidence can attend a vicious course of life, but that of its being one continued error; *jolly* in the entrance and progress, and *shame* and *misery* in the end. The wicked man cannot be certain of his acting as a reasonable creature

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ought to do, who has an immortal soul to take care of, and an everlasting state to provide for, when it is certain he does not: he may, indeed, through gross ignorance, or for want of serious consideration, or from the deceitful and hardning nature of sin, think himself a wiser man, than another who takes the word of God for his rule; he may despise all but his own party, as a company of fools, and boast of his thinking freely, and reasoning strongly, when he tramples upon the principles of education, and is able to laugh at those things which would formerly perhaps, have made him tremble; but it is not the *light* which gives him this confidence, but the *thick darkness* he is in; or if they must needs call it *light*, it is not the *light* of the sun, but a false and delusive *light*, which leads him hither and thither, backwards and forwards, always wrong, as wandering vapours and exhalations sometimes do the benighted traveller. ° *He puts darkness for light, and light for darkness*; his reason or ° *understanding is darkned*; there is a sort of *light* raised by the heat of his imagination and passions, out of his corrupt heart, which he mistakes for the *light* of the mind, and accordingly follows to his own destruction; he has not, he cannot have that clear perception

Isai. v. 20.

° Ephes. iv. 18.

ception of things relating to his duty and interest, that evidence and satisfaction of his being right, which attend the *path of the just*. In this the religious man has vastly the advantage, being sure by the *light* that shineth upon his path, that it is the *path of God's commandments*, and that it is the *path of life*.

I. HE is sure that it is the *path of God's commandments*. That God himself is a Being of all moral perfection, holy, just, faithful, kind and good, he can no more reasonably doubt, than that there is a God. This may be reckoned a *first principle*; and this *principle* being laid down, there is little room for doubt, that a virtuous and religious behaviour is most pleasing to God, being that in which we imitate him most nearly, and act most agreeably to the relations between him and us. Whatever God is, he cannot but *will* his reasonable creatures, according to their capacities, should endeavour to be; whatever duties result from the knowledge we have, or may have, of his being our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, it must be his *will* we should perform. Now this is nothing else but a description of a religious life, which consists of such actions as are suited to our dependance upon God, and obligations to him,
(viz.

(viz. prayer, trust, thanksgiving, adoration, and every thing else that enters into the notion of godliness) or such actions and qualities in which we more directly resemble God, as in being and doing good, and following the dignity of our nature, as God always acts according to the excellence of his. Nothing therefore can be made more evident by the light of the *sun*, than this to the good man by the light of *reason* and *scripture*, that God approves his way as far as he takes care of it himself, that it is conformable to his will, and consequently to the dictates of eternal reason, which can never be opposite to that which God commands and approves. Religion then is the *way of God's commandments*, and the *right way*; the truly religious man sees that it is: And 2. He sees that it is the *path of life*, that it conducts to eternal life and felicity in another world.

His way being covered with light, he can take a view of it from the beginning to the end; his prospect lies clear and distinct before him; his way is strait and plain, without the least deflection, so that looking forwards he discovers the heavenly city where his path terminates. This is a mighty satisfaction to a man while passing through this world, to be certain both of his *way* and of his *end*; to know that his conduct is agreeable

able to the will of God, and to the reason of things, and that eternal life will be his reward. There is no room to doubt that it *shall be well with the righteous*, that the end of a religious life will be happy; the connection between holiness and happiness is necessary; and consequently the good man has the same certainty of being *happy* hereafter, as of his being *holy* now. In this case, none of those fears can hang upon his mind which perplex the sinner, who as often as he thinks of the issue of his present course of life, cannot but apprehend it will be dismal, and for that reason turns away his thoughts from it, as much as he can. Thus you see, that as the *light* discovers a man's path to him what it is, so he that walks in the way of religion, is sure of its being the way of *God's commandments*, and the *way of life*; he discovers it to be so by the *light* both of *reason* and *revelation*; besides which, there is another *light* immediately arising from a *holy life*, which disperses those clouds that obscure the *light* both of *reason* and *scripture*, and leaves the mind fully satisfied that no one acts rightly but he that acts virtuously and religiously. The religious man has a more lively sense of this than any other person whatsoever; for not being satisfied with taking a view of religion at a distance, as other
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men do, nor regarding it as a sort of idle speculation, but having made trial of it and reduced the rules of it to practice, his judgment is hereby enlightened, and he has his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. His belief that the religious part of mankind were in the right, was his chief inducement to try whether they were so or no, and having tried, he can say, "now I not only *believe*, but *know* that this is the way, and am determined to continue in it."—This is the *first* thing; *the path of the just*, or a religious life, is fitly resembled to the *light*, for the *certainty and evidence* it carries along with it, which in the conduct of life, will by every wise man be esteemed no small advantage.

II. WE may consider this comparison as intended to signify the great *beauty and excellence* of a holy life. Nothing more lovely than *light* in the whole creation, nothing more valuable and necessary. After *the Spirit of God began to move upon the face of the deep*, *light* was the first thing produced; and when the whole *six days* works were finished, *light* continued to be the *first*, the *first* I mean of all merely visible and material things. And accordingly, the *sun*, the great fountain of *light* in our world, was appointed

Genes. i. 2, 3.

appointed to rule the day, and over all those things which are under the sun; and in progress of time, as men grew vain in their imaginations, was mistaken for a visible Divinity. Light is not a greater material beauty, than holiness is a beauty of a spiritual or moral kind. It is the noblest ornament of a rational spirit, and sheds a lustre on all its powers and faculties. The soul is the glory of man; holiness is the glory of the soul. By the † beauty of the Lord, which the Psalmist expresses such an earnest desire to behold in the house of God all the days of his life; (which is said to be in his sanctuary, and upon the account of which chiefly the temple seems to be called the beauty of holiness) by this beauty I say, we may suppose is understood that body of light and cloud of glory, which took up its abode between the cherubim over the mercy-seat, and was the appointed symbol or token of the divine presence. May not the heart of every good man with as great propriety be stiled a sanctuary and the beauty of holiness? I may say with greater, since there is a real holiness and beauty in the heart that is sanctified by divine grace, for the sake of which God delights to dwell there. Holiness is likewise the beauty of the life; a life in which religion presides, directing all the pursuits

pursuits and actions of it, has a brightness and splendour which is but faintly represented by that which the light of the sun lends to the objects it shines upon. Accordingly the Church, being a holy society, is celebrated for her beauty both in the Old Testament and the New. Let it be added, that as *light*, so *holiness* is as excellent and valuable as it is lovely. Of how little worth would other things be in the visible world, without the light of the sun. In like manner, all other qualities and accomplishments would signify but little without holiness in the moral world; they would rather be hurtful than useful to the possessor himself, and to other persons. Knowledge and power are desirable things, but that is in conjunction with moral goodness. If we suppose no such thing as virtue and religion in the world (nor so much as kind inclinations of nature's planting to make men act for the benefit of society, when they have no principle of conscience to move them to it) the more knowledge and power any man had, he would only be the more capable of doing mischief. Unless men are taught to make a right use of their other talents and abilities by religion and virtue, they had better be without them; especially when they are as void of good nature or benevolence, as they are of moral goodness. Under the influ-

influence of the former, they may indeed do some good in society, but if religion and virtue have no share in the good they do, they are to expect no reward beyond this life.

III. *THE pleasantness of a holy life is intended in this comparison. Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun.* When our Saviour opened the eyes of those that were born blind, what a pleasing ecstasy must they be in! They must have a sort of joy which they never knew before, and be more sensible of their former unhappiness than they were when they actually laboured under it. Thus, where the grace of God, concurring with men's own endeavours, has made a saving change, and ^b *turned men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*, inspiring them with the love of all goodness, which they steadily pursue and practise, they have pleasures before unknown, pleasures that excite a more lively perception when they are compared with the forlorn state of the unconverted sinner. For the greater distinctness we may consider the pleasures of religion and virtue under these three heads—the pleasures of action—the pleasures of reflection—and the pleasures of hope.

I. *THERE*

^a Eccles. xi. 7.

^b Acts xxvi. 18.

I. THERE are the pleasures of action, with which religion rewards its followers. All pleasure supposes action; for God having made man an active Being, has so ordered it, that idleness, or doing nothing, shall be its own punishment; and further, to instruct him that there is a difference in actions, God has so framed him, that the best pleasures should attend the best actions, and that whatever pleasures flow from bad actions, being of a lower kind, and inconsistent with much nobler ones, they should only be for the trial of our virtue, which is heightened by abstinence from them, and not be understood as any encouragement to them. Why is there a greater pleasure in mortifying our lusts, than in gratifying them, but that we might be convinced of the reasonableness of that mortification which religion enjoins us, and be persuaded to the practice of it from this consideration, that what we call *self-denial*, is so only with regard to the *body*, not upon the *whole*, since the man that denies himself sinful gratifications, for conscience-sake, enjoys more pleasure than he fore-goes? And if a religious life, as it consists in avoiding that which is evil, be pleasant, it is no less so as it employs a man in doing good. Every virtuous action is pleasant, and the more pleasant,

sant, as it is done with a more express regard to a man's duty, and with a more explicit and stronger bent of the will; and in some extraordinary instances (as when a man does more good, and surmounts more difficulties and opposition in doing it) the pleasure is extraordinary. In the course of a religious life, pleasure waits on every step the christian takes; every virtue, and every act of each virtue, produces an instantaneous satisfaction; nay, his civil and common actions, which directly considered, have nothing of virtue in them; yet being influenced and conducted by an habitual regard to the rules of his christian profession, are not without their proper pleasure, by which means the good man has this advantage above others, that his life has not so many barren spots in which no pleasure grows, as that of the sinner has. If we carry on our inquiry to those actions that are more properly *religious*, and are so called by way of distinction from the acts of virtue themselves, I mean those that relate to the *worship* of God both private and social, we shall find the pleasure to be still more elevated and divine. Devotion is the most rapturous exercise of a human mind; for what is devotion in its general notion, but the soul's converse with God? And can such a converse be without delight where the soul is fitted for it, which

is here supposed? When the understanding, the heart, and natural temper conspire, when a man at the same time has just and enlarged views of the divine perfections, has a soul that sparkles with the divine image and a happy warmth and flow of affection; when this is the case, no pleasures on this side heaven, can deserve to be named with those of devotion; that is, of contemplation, prayer, and praise, every one of which is animated by holy love; nor is the pleasure small where devotion is sincere, though in the lowest degree, unless the christian's doubts and fears whether he be accepted, prevail so far as to destroy the pleasure.

2. THERE are the *pleasures of reflection*, after the action is past. This is a privilege indeed, that the religious man can enjoy the *past* as well as the *present*. The time *past* is lost, considered as a part of duration; in this sense it is never to be recalled; it is impossible we should live over the months and years that are gone; but time, as filled with good actions, is never lost, while the memory of it remains. See here one mighty difference between the truly religious, and other men. As to the latter, the time they have lived, not having been improved by them, is worse than lost, for they have no fruit from it, and yet must give an account of it to God. Vice which allured them with

with its harlot's face, as it approached them in a temptation, has another appearance when viewed behind, and frights them with its ghastly train; and as for the guilty pleasures to which they sacrificed their most valuable interests and hopes, they are no pleasures now, but turn to wormwood and gall in the remembrance; at least thus it is, if conscience be not quite stupified. If there was any such art as that of *forgetfulness*, the sinner many times would gladly learn it; but because he cannot so easily blot things out of his memory, he therefore makes it his endeavour to stifle his conscience, being ready to say to conscience, when it calls him to account for his past life, *Hast thou found me, O my enemy?* So let wicked men call, and esteem their conscience; good men have no reason to regard conscience as their enemy, which encourages them to continue in well-doing, by rewarding them for the good they have done. Conscience anticipates the sentence of the last day, *well done good and faithful servant*; thou art the servant of God; thou hast pursued his will and not thine own, and placed thy glory in promoting his. Reflection is one of those faculties by which man is distinguished from the beast of the field. By the help of this wonderful faculty things past may be made present to the mind; and a most useful fa-

culty this may be made, provided men put it to its right use, by seriously reflecting on their own ways, and the ways of God, that knowing how they have acted, they may the better know how they ought to act for the future; and by the goodness of God which they have experienced in a long course of benefits, how unworthy of it soever they have been, may be excited to a more faithful and careful performance of their duty. And as the power of *reflection* may be made exceeding useful, so if it be not our own fault, it may be an inlet to very great pleasures. It is so to the person who has lived in all good conscience towards God and man; such a person, when he takes a view of his life which has been governed by the principles of religion, has a pleasure which none of the pleasures of sin (though they were not, as they are, bitterness in the end) can compare with; a pleasure he can repeat when he will, and the more valuable in that while it springs from time *past* it runs on unto the *future*; for

3. THERE are the *pleasures of hope and trust* in God; and in these pleasures the soul looks forward into future time, and enjoys the future duration of the next life. *If our heart condemn us not, then* (saith St. John) *have we confidence towards God.* We are confident

¹ John iii. 21.

confident of his favour and protection ; we have great *joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.* *Hope* grows up into a kind of assurance, which places the soul as on an immoveable foundation, a rock of ages in the sea of time ; and when the billows of adversity run highest, and beat upon it with the greatest violence, when the evil days come in which all the pleasures of the sinner leave him, the pleasures of the good man still subsist ; those mentioned under the *two* former particulars, and the pleasure of *hope* ; by all which (particularly the last) he finds himself exceedingly strengthened and supported. *Hope* fortifies the mind in the prospect of evil, so as to secure it against the disquietude which immoderate and boundless fears occasion ; and when evils arrive, bears the mind above them. “ I myself am a poor
 “ infirm creature, without strength, and
 “ without courage if left alone ; but I am
 “ not left alone ; the God I trust in is ever
 “ nigh to protect, and guide, and assist me ;
 “ his power is almighty, his wisdom and
 “ goodness infinite, and his faithfulness that
 “ which never fails. I will not therefore
 “ faint in the day of adversity, nor fear
 “ before it comes. Next to being set above
 “ the reach of all evils (which is the privilege of the saints in heaven) is being un-
 Ec 3 “ der

“der such a protection while we are incom-
 “passed with them. As long as I have
 “this hope in God I cannot be without joy
 “and delight in him; I rejoyce to think that
 “*he is my shepherd* and defence in this life,
 “and that he will be *my portion for ever*.”—

This is the *third* thing, the *pleasantness* of a
 holy life is intimated by this comparifon;
 fuch a life being attended with the *pleafures*
 of *action*, of *reflection*, and of *hope*; fo that
 the time *past*, *present*, and *to come*, all con-
 tribute to the entertainment of the pious
 mind.

IV. THE *path of the juft*, or a religious
 life, is as the *fhining light* in refpect of its
instructivenefs.—This is no fmall recommen-
 dation of it, and this with fome other ad-
 vantages attending it, I fhall diftinctly repre-
 fent to you in the next Difcourfe; in the
 mean time commending what you have heard
 to your ferious confideration, and to the di-
 vine bleffing.

S E R-



S E R M O N XVII.

The advantage of a religious life
in point of certainty, beauty,
worth, and pleasantness.

PROV. iv. 18.

*But the path of the just is as the
shining light, that shineth more
and more unto the perfect day.*

BY the *path of the just*, which the wise man recommends in the Text, is meant a life of piety and virtue, or of universal righteousness in heart and conversation towards God and man. By comparing it to *the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*, he designed to express the *great advantages* of this kind of life, and its *preferableness* to the life of the sinner. In order to ingage you to choose this

life, or chearfully to persevere in the right path if you have chosen it, I proposed distinctly to represent the *advantages* intimated in this comparison. I have treated the following.

I. *THE path of the just* is fitly compared to the *shining light* for the *certainty* and *evidence* it carries along with it. The good man is certain that he is in the *way of God's commandments* and in the *way to life and happiness*.

II. WE may consider this comparison as intended to signify the *great beauty* and *excellency* of a holy life.

III. *THE pleasantness* of a holy life is intimated by this comparison; and the good man has the pleasures of action—the pleasures of reflection—and the pleasures of hope—the past, the present, and the future, all contribute to the entertainment of the pious mind.—I now proceed to another commendation of this life.

IV. *THE path of the just*, or a religious life, is as the *shining light* in respect of its *instructiveness*. By the light which it diffuses all around, others are invited into the same way and guided in it. For this reason our blessed Lord tells his disciples, that *their*

their light should so shine before men, that seeing their good works, they might glorify their Father in heaven. How glorify him? Not only by magnifying his *power* and *grace*, which had bestowed such gifts on men, but by doing the same works, to which they are insensibly led by observing the excellent examples, which the true followers of Jesus set before them. There is not only the light of holy *doctrine* but of a holy *conversation*; and very often the effect of this is greater than that of the other, convincing men of the *practicableness* as well as *excellence* of religion, and kindling an emulation to perform what has been performed by others, and to climb the same heights. Upon this account we may say of those who live up to this christian institution, what our blessed *Saviour* said to his Apostles who were the *first* preachers of it, that *they are the light of the world*; and indeed, if there were not some such lights in this benighted spot, the whole world must lie in darkness; but now that God has provided, that hardly any place (where the Gospel is preached, and the ordinances of it in any tolerable manner dispensed) should be intirely without them, from those *lights* which adorn the church of God (some of them *burning and shining*) others are continually kindled, and

so this divine light is both multiplied and perpetuated. This should be a great encouragement to true christians, that God makes use of their *examples* for the bringing others home to himself; this indeed is no ground of *boasting*, but a very reasonable one of *rejoicing*. As it should further be a more powerful motive and inducement to the same persons to be more circumspect and exact in their conversation, and to abound more in every virtue, to the end their *light* may shine still brighter, and their *example* be more extensively beneficial. To do good, that we may have *praise of men*, is a very low view; but to labour to excel, among other reasons, that God may have the greater praise, and religion spread and triumph, is a very commendable sort of ambition.

V. WE are further led to consider the *progressive nature* of true religion. For as the *morning-light shineth more and more* according to the sun's height in the heavens, so the good man (if he follows the conduct and obeys the impulse of the divine principle with him) is still advancing in goodness; the soul has a consciousness of its not having yet attained, and that it is as yet, far from being perfect; hence arise desires and endeavours after further attainments, and higher

higher degrees of perfection. These desires are increased by what it has felt and experienced, and by the secret operations of the *Holy Spirit*, which (where it is not resisted) never ceases prompting the soul to go forward, and to quicken its pace the further it goes.

THE *path of the just man shineth more and more* in several respects. He improves in his knowledge and apprehension of divine things—in the adhesion of his will to them—in the perfection of his example—and finally, in the ease and pleasure of doing well.

I. THE *just* or good man improves in his knowledge and apprehension of divine things. I here suppose that he acts according to the tendency of his new nature; and if he does, his understanding will be more free from prejudices and obstructions, and as the consequence of that more irradiated with the beams of heavenly truth. As to the *general* principles of evangelical truth, his mind may be as fully stored as it will ever be in this life, so as not to be able to increase their number; but then he may be continually *unfolding* these truths, his conception of them may be more *distinct*, he may disengage himself from *lesser errors* which he once held together with the truth, and have his searches rewarded with new discoveries, which though they do not affect the *essence* of
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of religion, or those things which are necessary to be *explicitly* known and believed, are yet by the enlightened mind valued as a great treasure.

2. THE adhesion of the will to divine things increases. This is properly the *strength* of *grace*; for in proportion as the rational inclination of the soul, or the bent of the will is more firmly fixed on the things of God and religion, the soul is safer against temptations to sin, and obtains more frequent and complete victories over them. And according to the natural progress of the life of God in the soul, this adhesion of the will grows stronger with time, so as to bear some proportion with the enlarging views of the mind, which may be one reason of the Apostle's joining together, *growing in grace* and in the *knowledge of Jesus Christ*; these two having a mutual influence upon each other. While I am on this subject I would desire you carefully to distinguish this adhesion of the will to God, or the soul's rational and deliberate choice of religion, from a *sensible flow of the affections* in the duties of God's worship. These two are things of a distinct consideration, and very often actually separated. There may be a great deal of strength in the union of the will to the spiritual object, (which we may call

^b 2 Pet. iii. 18.

a *rational affection*) when the workings of the *sensitive affections* through a coldness of natural temper or bodily disorders, or the advances of age may be very feeble, perhaps hardly perceivable. And on the other hand, persons may experience a great warmth of passion and vehement agitations of the soul, who are without the *truth of grace*, or at best very weak and unsettled in the rational choice and pursuit of a heavenly felicity by the way of a heavenly life. Where is the christian who is steady and regular in his conversation, and in his conflict with the enemy, comes off with most honour to himself and credit to religion? This is he who hath most of the *power of godliness*, though in the *affectionate* part which too many mistake for it, he may be exceeded by others.

3. THE *just* or good man shines brighter in the perfection of his example. The experienced and well-established christian, who has been long *increasing with all the increase of God*, has fewer blemishes in his conversation than others have, and than he himself once had. He has more thoroughly *cleansed himself from all filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit*, has observed what was amiss and corrected it, what was deficient and supplied it; at least he has made some considerable progress in this good employment, and resolves never to be diverted from it.

it. His example was formerly *good*, it is now *better*, and his ambition and endeavour is that it may be eminently so. I must here again put you in mind that I am describing a person who *stirs up the grace of God in him*, and in obedience to the call of God is perpetually tending forward and upward. One of this character labours about his *example* as the *Statuary* or the *Painter* do in the works of their respective arts. A man who seeks to be famous in either of these professions, aims at the strictest conformity of every work he undertakes (especially such as his reputation more immediately depends upon) to the rules of his art; and before he puts his finishing hand strives to give a beauty to the whole which cannot be expressed. So would the *Christian* whose view is to *adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour*, have his life more exactly conformable to the rules of christianity, and if possible, clothed with all the additional charms which can attend it; for this is his profession to *live well*, as it is of the persons before mentioned to *carve* or *paint well*. And a glorious profession it is, in which if he be wise, he will be still improving, that his works may be more perfect both before God and in the sight of men.

4. THE

2 Tim. i. 6.

Tit. ii. 39.

4. THE effect of all this is, that the *just* or good man advances in the ease and pleasure of well-doing. I have observed before, that by the metaphor of *light*, the *pleasure* of a religious life is insinuated; and forasmuch as it is compared to the *morning-light which shineth more and more*, this denotes that the pleasure is *still increasing*, if no ill conduct of our own, or extraordinary accident prevent. Let the christian do his duty, let him be watchful and diligent, and make advances in piety in some measure proportioned to the time past since his entering the service of his Maker, and to the helps and opportunities he has enjoyed, and he will find that as *the ways of wisdom or religion are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*, so this pleasure and peace are upon the growing hand: he will have his faculties more adapted to these divine pleasures, his relish for them will be greater as his opinion of sensual enjoyments lessens, and his appetite after them grows more cool and temperate; and he will have the additional satisfaction of reflecting, that he has persevered so long in his duty notwithstanding all the solicitations to the contrary, which he has met with, and that having retained his integrity in the midst of greater temptations than are remaining, he shall never, with
the

the divine assistance, let it go. While the pleasure which depends upon the liveliness of the passions declines with years, the serious christian will injoy more of the solid satisfactions of a holy life, and be peculiarly happy in this respect, that his sincerity will be more out of question having been longer tried, virtuous habits more rooted, his judgment more mature, his resolutions more firm, and his perseverance (humanly speaking) more certain. Excepting extraordinary and unforeseen cases, for which he takes care not to be unprovided, he knows the main dangers and difficulties of the way are past, and his *salvation much nearer than when he first believed.* “ God who has brought me thus far, will not leave me at last; having been faithful to him so many years, I trust I shall be faithful to the death. I have escaped in so many conflicts through Christ who has loved me; a few more, O my soul, and my warfare will be accomplished!” The thought of all this must, and very reasonably too, afford a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction. — This ends the *fifth* head, or the *progressive nature* of true religion.

VI. IN-

¹ Rom. xiii. 11.

VI. INASMUCH as the *light* of the morning to which the *path of the just* is compared, *shineth more and more unto the perfect day*, the meaning is, that a religious life will at last issue in a state of *consummate perfection*; for so we know that high-noon succeeds to the morning, and excels it in glory.—There is a two-fold *perfection* in the future state, *viz.* of *holiness* and *happiness*.

I. THERE is in the next life a *perfection of holiness* to which all those arrive who are sincerely holy in this; who are therefore stiled *the spirits of the just made perfect*. And not till now has that expression its full accomplishment of their being *perfect as their father in heaven is perfect*; that is, according to the capacity of their nature; for now every sinful defect ^b *is done away, because that which is perfect is come*, not the least irregularity is left, no inclination to that which is evil, no want of strength and vigour in the inclination to that which is good; that order to which *grace* has restored the faculties is now completed, and each faculty is raised and enlarged to its utmost extent; that *charity* or love to God which was to *abide* when

^a Heb. xii. 23.

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

faith and *hope* should cease, and which is the *bond of perfection*, is now itself made *perfect*; so that the *saints* in glory as well as the *angels* of the divine presence, may be said to be a *flame of fire*. O most blessed world, of which we can now form but very obscure and distant apprehensions! What it is to be made *perfect in holiness* as the heavenly spirits are, we shall never know till we are received up into their number. See here something more than *Paradise restored*, for here is not only *innocence* but *impeccability*; not only a present freedom from sin, but such a degree of knowledge, such a strong determination of the will, and such an immediate communication with the Deity, as secure the tenants of that celestial Paradise from ever sinning. Notwithstanding the perfection of innocence which man enjoyed before he eat the forbidden fruit, there was a sort of imperfection attending his state of trial; by which is meant, that his nature was not clothed with all the positive perfection of which it was capable, as the *spirits of the just* are in the state of *recompences*.

2. THIS *perfection of holiness* will be attended with a correspondent *perfection of happiness*, for these two are always inseparable. There is a connexion between *holiness*

liness and *happiness* in this life ; but then the *holiness* of the best men is imperfect, and so is their *happiness*, there being remains of *sin*, there are the same of *suffering* : not to add, that those of the most eminent piety are sometimes *afflicted* more than others, that they may have an opportunity to glorify God, and do honour to religion by their faith, and hope, and patience, and partake more largely of the divine holiness and favour ; but *heaven* being the *final* state of man, the blessedness of the righteous in that upper world shall bear proportion to their sinless purity ; they shall be as *happy* as they can be, because they are as *holy*. The pleasure and satisfaction which immediately result from perfect faculties must be very great ; great must be the satisfaction of the mind, inconceivably great, when it finds itself in every respect as it would be ; but this is not the *whole* of its happiness, let me say, nor the *principal* part of it. The holy soul shall not only enjoy itself, but enjoy God, ^k *see him as he is*, and be perpetually filled and supplied from this infinite ocean of good ; the object shall more than match the faculty, which instead of occasioning any uneasiness between them, will increase the pleasure of fruition ; for the soul of man, though finite,

F f 2

has

has something boundless in its views, by means of which it is wonderfully gratified and entertained with a boundless prospect—So far then the resemblance holds between the *path of the just and the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; but here it fails, the day is no sooner perfect, has no sooner reached its noon, than it begins to *decline* again, till it mingles with the shades of the evening, and is at length lost in the darkness of the night; but the *light of heaven is one eternal day*; the blessedness of the righteous, like their Being, is without any end of time; nor is there any pause or succession as of light and darkness in this world. Of the heavenly *Jerusalem* it is said, ¹ *there is no night there*, for which reason, when we compare a religious life, after it has reached its highest rising with the light of the sun, we must not consider the sun *relatively* to any part of our earth, but as it is *in itself* a fountain of light, which whether we see it or no, shines with unfading brightness; and accordingly, our Saviour speaking of the end of the world saith, ^m *then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, even as the stars of heaven for ever and ever*.

LET me now *Apply* what has been offered to *two* sorts of persons.

First,

¹ Rev. xxi. 25.

^m Mat. xiii. 43. Dan. xii. 3.

First, I would address myself to such as are not yet in the number of these *just* persons whom the Text describes, and who cannot think that they are, if at all, willing to be acquainted with their true character. You have hitherto *walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and stood in the way of sinners*; you have not only associated with such, but come under this denomination of *sinners* yourselves, and of the *ungodly*. How often have you had the guilt and misery of such persons set before you? And on the other hand, the manifold, the inexpressible advantages which attend a life of religion? And with what view has this been done, but if possible, to prevail upon you either from a sense of your *duty*, or of your *danger*, or from a principle of *gratitude*, or *interest*, to leave the ways of wickedness, and to be *companions of them who fear the Lord*? Shall we ever speak in vain, as we have done so long, though as often as we have spoken to you in the name of the Lord, we have really been pleading with you the cause of your own happiness, and intreating you to have compassion on your own souls; and if we have not had your *inclinations* (blind corrupt *inclinations*) have yet had your *reason* and *conscience* on our side? What is it we desire you to be,

but to be *wise* and *happy*; to resolve upon such a course of action, as is fitly compared to the *shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*? Is it so, that in a holy life there is the greatest certainty and evidence of a man's being in the right; beauty and excellence, pleasure, the pleasures of action, reflection, and hope, instruction and profit to others, a continual progression and tendency towards greater degrees of knowledge, of strength and establishment, a better example, and more ease and pleasure in doing well; and finally, the prospect of consummate bliss and holiness after death; each of them separately enough to recommend the life I am persuading you to, and much more all of them together? O that I knew where to find words to overcome your prejudices, and make you yield to the truth! Even the representation which I have now made of things, defective as it has been, would not be without success, would you but *seriously* consider and lay it to heart. May the God of all *grace* excite and ingage you to consider the things of your peace, and continue so to influence your minds by the operations of his *Holy Spirit* upon them, that from *consideration* you may pass to *resolution*, and from *resolution* to *action*! Methinks I would not give up all hope, that some of
you

you may be in this disposition of soul, willing to consider, and to hearken to good advice; and accordingly I would briefly recommend to you these few *Directions*.

I. IMMEDIATELY enter upon a holy life.—Delay not a moment longer, since not so much as one good reason can be given for such delay, but you yourselves, if you impartially examine your own thoughts, may be able to give a great many forceable reasons against it. If you ever intend to lead a religious life, why not now? If you do not embrace such a life now, how can you be sure you shall ever do it? Nay, where is the probability you should, if you tarry till you find no opposition to such a change of life within yourselves, or from the world? Believe it, if you wait for such a time as this, you wait for what will never come. Say therefore as *Ephraim* of old, “*What have I to do any more with idols?*”
 “What have I to do, to follow the command
 “of this and that *lust*, as if it was my supreme and rightful Lord? I do now, even
 “this day, *avouch the Lord to be my God, to*
 “*walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes and*
 “*commandments, and to hearken to his voice.*”

2. BEGIN well, that is, with repentance and godly sorrow for the sins of your lives

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past,

past, and faith in the mercy of God thro' Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of them. —You must endeavour to get a lively sense of sin in general, and of the many aggravations of your own sins in particular. You are then to lament and confess them before the throne of divine *grace*, begging of God to give you, out of his infinite goodness and mercy, and for the sake of his well-beloved Son, that sight of sin, and repentance for it, which is *unto life*; and upon the account of that all-sufficient atonement, which has been made by the sacrifice of the cross, to forgive you all your offences. If you have this sincere compunction of soul, for having offended the great and gracious Author of your Beings, and acted ungratefully towards your Redeemer, and this humble reliance on the mercy of God through the mediation of his only Son, you will not then be so likely to miscarry in the following steps of this important work.

3. BEWARE of taking up with a *partial* holiness.—This is no needless caution; the frequent instances of those who have been guilty of this fatal delusion, render it but too seasonable and necessary. Under convictions of sin, which are too strong to be easily shaken off, men are obliged, for the quiet of their own minds, to do something
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in religion, to forbear some sinful practices, to perform some duties, and to acquire the *outside* at least of some virtues; and though this be a very imperfect change, yet they deceive themselves so far as to think, it is what the scripture means by *repentance*, *regeneration*, and *holiness* of life. Alas, how could they think so, if they rightly considered the matter! But of this they are willingly ignorant, that *holiness* is an *inward* principle, and a thing of the most *universal* and *extensive* influence. Let me therefore intreat you to recollect the character given of the truly *just* man, in the introduction to these Discourses, and never to forget it; *that he is in the first place just to God, and therefore just to his neighbour, and to his own soul.* Unless therefore your *righteousness* exceed that, which commonly passes under that name, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. The *righteousness* of the Gospel, or true religion, is a system of graces and duties inseparably linked together, so that where all are not, there is really never a one; and where there is one, there are all. A religion destitute of any grace which the Gospel commands, can no more be called, and accounted *saving* religion, than a Deity who is supposed to be without the *moral* perfections of *holiness*, *faithfulness*, and *goodness*, can be the living and true God.

Let

Let me beseech you therefore, as you would not fall into an error, which must end in unavoidable destruction, to take heed of framing a wrong notion of a holy life. Such a life hath both an *outward*, and an *inward* part; one consists in the *practice* of universal holiness, the other in the *love* of it. A godly life is not consistent with the habitual commission of any known sin, or the omission of any known duty; nor the life of God in the soul, with the reign of any corrupt affection, or the absence of any good one.

4. BE not surprised or discouraged if such a change as this be not wrought in an instant. — The comparison in the Text plainly intimates the contrary. The light of the morning is at first hardly discernable, and when we can say *the day dawns*, yet for some time the darkness is more than the light. Real holiness implies the *love* of that which is good; but at first you may not act so much out of *love to God* and your *duty*, as from *fear*; and even after *love* is come to be the *prevailing principle*, the operations of *fear* may be most sensible. For some time you may find a great deal of difficulty in resisting and vanquishing a temptation, and at last may be *saved* from it *as by fire*; barely escaping out of the hand of your enemy, not coming off with honour from

from the encounter. Finding such a struggle as this between their good and bad inclinations, between the *spirit* and the *flesh*, and what they have hitherto done, has been as it were by force and constraint, and against the grain, too many conclude that it will never be otherwise, that they shall never get the victory, nor have their hearts changed, upon which depends all the pleasure and acceptableness of religion; and by this means they are so discouraged as to *draw back*, and this many times to *perdition*. But how came they to be so extremely discouraged, when they do not make all the progress in a little time which they desire? I believe it generally proceeds from a *false* notion they take up of *conversion*, as if it was an *instantaneous change*, as if the habits of sin were destroyed, and the habits of virtue planted in their room, by a *single act* of the *Divine Spirit*, and not by *repeated acts* of their *own*, in concurrence with, and subordination to the *grace* of God; for being possessed of such a notion as this, and not perceiving such a thorough change in themselves, they presently suppose that they are as far from the kingdom of heaven as ever, and that till *grace* works *irresistibly* in them, they shall never be able to get out of the state they are in. This being the unhappy and natural effect of this mistaken notion
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of *conversion*, we the ministers of the Gospel cannot take too much care to warn our hearers against it. From a deep conviction of the sinfulness of your former course of life, and the necessity of living after another manner, and for other and nobler ends, have you ceased to do the evil you once did, and imploring the illumination and assistance of God's *Holy Spirit*, endeavoured to do that which is good? Let me say (and I speak it for your encouragement) you have *begun well*. Only *proceed* as you have *begun*, and you will *end well* too. There is nothing else worth learning that you can learn in a moment; in acquiring some arts and professions, whole years must be spent; and why should you fancy it to be otherwise in learning *to do well*? You must needs think that after a man has been *accustomed to do evil*, he cannot *presently learn to do well* with readiness, and with ease and pleasure. Let this be the use you make of the reflection on the imperfection of your state, after you have been a while imployed in reforming your hearts and lives, even to consider the necessity of a *persevering* resolution. Instead of inclining you to give over the attempt as vain and fruitless, let it only awaken your care, and kindle your desires after perfection. And remember further, that after the happy change is wrought, though you will be

be able to practise your duty with more pleasure, yet it will never be without all opposition, and that occasionally you may meet with dangerous temptations, for which therefore it is great wisdom to provide. Thus doing, and placing your intire confidence in the *grace* of God through Christ, you will have no reason to repent of your having chosen the ways of religion, nor in the end be ashamed of your hope.

Secondly, Let me now turn my *exhortation* to those that are *just* in the Gospel sense, for some such I hope, and am persuaded there are in this congregation. May their number be still increasing! Give me leave to mind you of some things which you will readily confess to be for your interest. Labour to ascertain and fix your own character—take to yourselves the comfort and satisfaction of it, and give the glory to God—walk circumspectly—And that you may be excited to go on with inward vigour, and with the greater delight in the way you are in, compare your condition as it is now with what it will be in the world of recompences.

I. LABOUR to ascertain and fix your own character.—It was wise advice, and has a deep meaning in it, *know thyself*. We shall do well

well to follow it in the present case. You think that you are *passed from death unto life*, and I suppose that you are so, but have you all the assurance of this, which the thing is capable of? If not, why should you not push your inquiries, and carry on your endeavours till you are arrived *to the full assurance of hope*? It is in your power to have the light shine *more and more* in this respect; I mean that inward light by which you will be able to discern the truth of your own case. *Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.* In a larger sense, the whole christian church are the *elect* of God; but *strictly* speaking, God's *elect* or chosen ones, are those who having kept themselves *unspotted of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, are by God set apart for himself, as *vessels of honour* fitted for his glory; and such as those do then *make their election sure*, when they *establish themselves in the favour of God*, and secure the approbation of their own minds, by *abounding in all the fruits of boneliness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.* And therefore (as it has been observed) after the direction, *make your calling and election sure*, some copies add *διὰ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων*, by good works, by those virtues which are mentioned in the preceding

ing verses of this chapter (2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.) *courage in the profession of the true religion; knowledge of the doctrines and duties of it; temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity; for if these things be in you and abound, ye shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, ver. 8. after which it follows in the 10th verse, wherefore the rather, brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure; i. e. by abounding in those virtues. And that this must be understood, is not only evident from this connexion of the 10th verse with the verses foregoing, but with the verse immediately following; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is only our abounding in the works of the Lord that can procure us an abundant entrance into his everlasting glory hereafter; and I may add into his kingdom of grace now; which, for ought I know, may be in part meant by this kingdom, since christians are said already ^a to have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*

2. TAKE to yourselves the comfort and satisfaction of the happy state you are in, and render the praise and glory of it to God, by whose grace you are what you are; not as
having

^a Heb. xii; 28.

having made you other persons without any *concurrence* of your own, but by succeeding your endeavours, which otherwise would have been ineffectual, and then accepting you to *eternal* life without any *merit* on your side.—Having thus ascribed glory to the *Father of lights*, as the *giver of every good and perfect gift*, you may afterwards very reasonably rejoice in those gifts which he has bestowed upon you. May we innocently take pleasure in the possessions and enjoyments of this life which are only the bounty of Providence, and have nothing discriminating in them? Much more then may we be allowed to do so in those gifts which are the fruits and tokens of God's *special favour*, and intitle us to his presence both in this life and that to come, which other things do not. To rejoice in this (that is, that we have an interest in all the promises of the Gospel, we being the persons to whom these promises were made, to rejoice I say in this) is not only what we may do, but what we ought to do. So saith our blessed *Lord* to his disciples (having told them of the *power* which he would give them, *to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, so that nothing should hurt them*) notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you ;

you ; but rather rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven. In like manner let me say, If God has favoured you with *temporal* blessings of any kind, if you have such things vouchsafed you, whereby your lives are rendered more commodious, and your Beings in any regard more valuable, rejoice not so much in these natural, civil, or worldly distinctions as in those of a *higher* kind ; rejoice not in being distinguished as one good man may be from another, and one wicked man from another, but in being distinguished as the *righteous* are from the *wicked*. And indeed to rejoice in the good things of this life, and not to rejoice in what we are, and injoy, as the children of God, much more manifestly betrays a want of *consideration*, if not the weakness of our *faith*. It shews, I say, that we do not consider as we ought, the happiness of our condition as true christians, which is so great, so vastly superiour to what the whole world (if injoyed by one man) with every thing valuable in it could bestow, as to compensate for the loss of all other things ; we do not consider this as we should, because then we should be able to *rejoice in the Lord always*, and should pass our lives with much more contentment and satisfaction than the

^f Phil. iv. 4.

generality even of true christians are observed to do.

3. WALK circumspectly at all times, and in all relations and circumstances of life, not intermitting your watch, or suffering the enemy to take any advantage upon you.—It is much easier to maintain the ground you have gotten, than after you have lost it to recover it again. Would you have your light shine more and more? Do not hope you can attain your wish any other way than by keeping it constantly unclouded by *wilful* sin. Let not success betray you to security. Perhaps you have not for some time been importuned by temptations, or you have overcome them, and made some good progress in religion; but do not therefore lay aside your vigilance, since there may happen such an alteration in your circumstances, or in your temper, that you may have as much occasion for it as ever you had in your lives, if not more. *† Blessed is the man that feareth always*; who has ever upon his mind such an apprehension of the great evil of sin, and his liableness to it while he is in the body, as, to be continually watchful against it; by thus *fearing always*, he will be able to *rejoice always*, both in the consciousness of his own integrity, and the hope of the heavenly reward.

† Prov. xxviii, 14.

ward.—And this leads me to the last Direction.

4. THAT you may be excited to go on with more vigour and greater delight in the way of righteousness, compare your condition as it is now with what it will be in the world of recompences.—You enjoy many advantages, all these will be complete, and many more added unto them in that future state. You shall in the light of glory as clearly discern the essential and everlasting difference between *righteousness* and *wickedness*, as you do any object now at mid-day with your bodily eyes; and know, without all possibility of being deceived, your *election* of God. You shall at once discern that no beauty is comparable to the beauty of holiness, and have your souls shine with this beauty so as they never did before. There is pleasure now in the exercise of faculties, when those faculties are restored to their intire rectitude, the acts of obedience and devotion will be more perfect, and the pleasure unspeakably greater. You have now the satisfaction to be continually *pressing towards the mark*, you will then have the satisfaction of having reached it; and being got safe to *Canaan*, will rejoice to look back on the *wilderness* you have passed. At present indeed, you labour under some disadvantages, they necessarily

cleave to your mortal condition ; but be not disheartened, for death will set you free from them all. A course of virtue and piety is not without its difficulties ; these difficulties shall gradually lessen, and at last quite vanish away. You have now your doubts, and fears, and temptations which disturb your peace, and abate your joys ; but consider it is only during this state of trial, that you are subject to any such thing, and this state of trial will shortly be over. *" Wait therefore on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your hearts ; wait, I say, on the Lord.* If you rightly consider it, your condition is happy now (especially when compared with that of the wicked and ungodly) but it will be much happier, happier than it can now enter into your hearts to conceive ; the thought of which should bear up your spirits, and make you unwearied in the way of your duty, often calling to mind the words of the Text, *that the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

" Psal. xxvii. 14.



S E R M O N XVIII.

A description of the Faith which
works by Love.

G A L. V. 6.

-----*But faith which worketh by
love.*

The whole verse runs thus.

*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth
any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith
which worketh by love.*

SUCH was the fondness of the Jews
for the *Mosaick* law, and such their opi-
nion of its virtue and efficacy to recommend
them to the favour of God, that even af-
ter they had imbraced the *Gospel*, many of
them were not to be persuaded with-
out difficulty to trust wholly to that for

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justification

justification in the sight of God, but would fain have joined the observation of the *law* with it, and upon that account so much prest the necessity of *circumcision*. This error, by the insinuating influence of some Judaizing teachers, had gained too much ground among the *Galatian* converts, which is the occasion of the Apostle's opposing it at large, and with some warmth in this *Epistle*; he lets them know, that as highly as they valued the *ceremonies* of the law and *circumcision* particularly, as introductory to all the rest, it must be something of a very different nature that would give them a title to the divine favour, since in *Jesus Christ*, or under the Gospel-dispensation, *neither circumcision availed any thing, nor uncircumcision*. The inquiry was not what men had been *before* they became christians (whether circumcised *Jews* or uncircumcised *Gentiles*) nor was any thing insisted upon *afterwards* as the condition of their being admitted into the number of Christ's true disciples, but their being ^a *new creatures*, as it is in another place, that is, inwardly and universally holy, or as it is in the Text, having that *faith which worketh by love*. There was no manner of necessity that their *faith* in *Christ* should be joined with the observation of the *law* of *Moses*. It was enough
if

^a Gal. vi. 15.

if it proved itself genuine by that sincere love to God and man which it inspired, and where it had not this effect, it was to be looked upon as nothing worth.

* *Faith* is the root or spring of the divine life, which implies, that the root must not be dead, nor the spring be dry. *Faith*, considered as a bare assent of the mind to the truth of the Gospel, is not peculiar to true christians; others may be as really persuaded as they that the Scriptures are the word of God, either through the influence of education, or by examining into the grounds and reasons of the christian religion, which are such as to satisfy all unprejudiced inquirers. The rule which our Saviour gives for the trial of true and false prophets, ^b *by their fruits ye shall know them*, is the only sure criterion or mark of a true faith. There is a great deal of life and energy in such a faith, it is an active principle, being in the lowest degree of sincerity, like a grain of mustard-seed (to which the Gospel itself is compared) ^c *which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree.* This is our Saviour's comparison for the Gospel, and it is a very pro-

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* For a more distinct account of the nature of Faith, see the Author's *Discourse on Saving Faith*.

^b Matt. vii. 16.

^c Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

per illustration of that amazing progress which our religion made from small beginnings, till it spread over a great part of the world ; yet perhaps not more agreeable to the Gospel itself than it is to that *faith* which the Gospel begets in the hearts of those which are real converts to it. As *mustard-seed* has a vigorous heat in it, which makes it when it meets with proper nourishment, dilate itself, and shoot up after a sudden and surprising manner, so is *evangelical faith* endowed with a lively and prolific virtue. This is therefore made the test of *saving faith* ;—^d *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God be careful to maintain good works.*—Now what need was there of Titus's pressing this matter as he is here directed to do, if on the one hand all who believed were of themselves ready to maintain them, without being admonished of the necessity of it ; or on the other hand, though they were not careful to maintain *good works*, yet they would come off well enough as long as they believed in God and Christ ? ^e *Faith if it has not works is dead, being alone*, saith St. James. And again ; *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ? Seest thou how faith wrought with his*
works ?

^d Tit. iii. 8. ^e James ii. 17, 21.

works? And by works was faith made perfect. Assent compleats the notion of *faith* in a philosophical sense; but however it may be in philosophy, *faith* in the *christian* notion cannot be *perfect without works*; without works of every kind commanded in the Gospel, whether relating to God, to our neighbour, or to ourselves. All such good works do naturally flow from a *living faith*, as might be easily shown. But at present I shall not treat of *faith* as expressing itself universally by *good works*, or as the immediate source of them, but as *working by love*, and by the subordinate agency of *love* giving birth to all other good works in the life and conversation of the christian. There is a close communication between those two excellent graces *faith* and *love*, of which two *faith* is the *cause* or principle, and *love* the *effect*. In pursuing this design let me show,

I. AFTER what manner *faith worketh by love*. And

II. THAT a *faith which worketh not by love* is, according to the estimation of the Gospel, good for nothing, and will avail nothing.

I. I SHALL endeavour to show after what manner *faith worketh by love*, or
the

the efficacy of true faith to the production of love.

1. Divine.
2. Brotherly. And
3. The love of Christ.

OF these it will be advantageous to discourse distinctly.

1. As to *divine love* or love to God, *faith* contributes to the birth or growth of it, to its beginning progress and consummation, these several ways.

1. BY representing God as the *chief good*, whereby it excites in the soul a *love of desire*.

2. BY representing God as the *fountain* of all that good which the christian enjoys in the order of *nature*, of *Providence*, and of *grace*, and thereby inspiring a *love of zeal and gratitude*. And

FINALLY, by representing God as not only *reconcilable*, but *actually reconciled* to all believing, penitent persons, by means whereof it draws forth a *love of complacency and delight*.

1. BY representing God as the *supreme good*, *faith* excites a *love of desire*. The
lan-

language of this love is, * *Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* The heart filled with *holy love* vents itself in this devout language; but then it is *faith* that is the teacher. *Faith* first convinces me that there is *none in heaven or on earth* so worthy of my choice as *God*, that no other Being has the excellencies which meet in him; that pleasure, satisfaction, and happiness are to be enjoyed in him alone, in the *degree* which the soul seeks after; that the things which usually pass under those names among men, are not what they are esteemed; that a man may as well see by the help of a *painted* sun, or gratify his hunger or thirst by the *representation* of a banquet, as be happy in the creature without God. The creature presents us with the *shadow* of happiness, in *God* only we find the *substance*, the *reality*. In the ballance of *natural reason* created good weighs *little*, in the ballance of *faith*, it is all *less than nothing and vanity*. *Faith* discovers the cheat which *sense* and *fancy* impose upon the greater part of mankind, instructs the soul in the true worth of things, according to their intrinsic nature, their suitableness to its capacities, and their longer or shorter duration. *Faith* keeps the soul from being misled by lying appearances, and
deceived

deceived by empty promises; renders to all their due, to God what is due to God, and to created Beings what is their due. And O how much is due to one, how little, how very little to the other! This lively conviction which *faith* works in the mind, concerning the emptiness of the creature and the all-sufficiency of God, kindles fervent desires after him as our *chief* and *ultimate felicity*. “ I plainly see that I have been
 “ hitherto fooled in my expectations of new
 “ degrees of pleasure in every new object;
 “ and of an increase of happiness with every
 “ increase of my worldly possessions and
 “ enjoyments. I see now that my life hitherto has been one continued error, or
 “ at least was so till I turned my feet from
 “ the ways of men to the ways of God,
 “ forsook lying vanities and inquired after
 “ God my maker. I am now arrived to
 “ such a certainty in this point, that I can
 “ no more forbear following after God, than
 “ I can refrain from desiring to be happy.
 “ I can no more consent to be without God
 “ than I can consent to be miserable; since
 “ to be miserable, and to be without God,
 “ are in my account one and the same thing.
 “ Therefore it is my desire to go forth towards thee, O thou first, and loveliest, and
 “ best of Beings, in whom I discover all
 “ beauty and perfection, all that my soul
 “ wants

“wants to employ her contemplations, to
 “silence her fears, to satisfy her inquiries,
 “to match her capacities, and to render her
 “at once both as perfect and as happy as
 “she can be.” Behold then the ground of
 our want of *love* to God! It is nothing else
 at bottom but our want of *faith*, attended
 with due *consideration*. We do not long af-
 ter God as our happiness, because we do not
 firmly believe, and seriously consider him
 to be so. A thorough persuasion of the
 worthlessness of the creature and of the in-
 finite fulness of God, would by the help of
 close and repeated consideration be followed
 with correspondent dispositions towards the
 one and the other; the one we should de-
 sire with moderation, and when proposed
 under the notion of our chief good heartily
 despise; the other would be the constant ob-
 ject of our importunate and unconquerable
 desires. My prayer therefore shall be, *that*
God would increase my faith; let not my
faith fail, and I know that my *love* will not
 languish.

2. By representing God as the *fountain*
 and *original* of all that good which we in-
 joy in the order of *nature*, of *Providence*,
 and of *grace*, *faith* inspires us with a *love*
 of *zeal* and *gratitude*. *Faith* not only tells
 me that God is the chief good and final hap-
 piness of man, but assures me further, that
 what-

whatever good of any kind there is besides God it all flows from him; that [§] *from above*, even from him *the Father of lights cometh down every good and every perfect gift*; that all the privileges of *nature*, all the bounties of *Providence*, all the riches of *grace* are to be ascribed to him, and are *equally* his gifts, differing from one another in the way of *conveyance*, not in their *original*; as if we received some things from the hands of God, and others not. Alas, there is nothing but what we have received! What we call *nature*, is nothing else but a *divine establishment*; what in the language of *Heathens* was called *fortune*, is nothing else but *divine Providence*, or a chain of succession of events under the *direction* and *disposal* of the wise Governour of the world; and as for the communications of *grace*, no one will pretend to derive them from any other source but God. He is the original of all good, whether relating to the body or to the soul, of both which, and all their faculties of action and injoyment he is the former; or to the world about us, of which he is the Creator and Preserver, of all good therefore whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal. So *faith* assures me, as does also *right reason*. And if I believe this, how can I otherwise than love God? How be other-
wise

§ James i. 17.

wife than grateful? How choose but be zealously affected towards him? Do some brute creatures, who have no other tutor but *natural instinct* love their benefactors? Are they in their way thankful and acknowledging? As fond of the person who constantly feeds them as of life itself, which they willingly hazard in his defence? Do they know how to single him out, and distinguish him from all others, and always take his part? What is this but an imperfect image of that *love* which the divine benefits viewed and considered by *faith*, create in the soul towards God? And what is it but a confounding reproach to those, who in the abundance of these favours which the hand of God heaps upon them are destitute of this *love*? When I consider that ^h *in God I live, and move, and have my being*, that he built, and upholds, and repairs this earthly frame, that my soul is his immediate *off-spring*, and like my body, is supported and supplied by him; that if I enjoy health, and peace, and comfort, and a good name and friends, a plenty or a competency of worldly good, I am indebted to his free and undeserved goodness for all; that if I want any of these I am to thank him that I do not want more or all of them; and that he will make the want of any temporal blessing to them that

that ⁱ *love him* better in the final issue than the injoyment of it could have been; when I further add the inestimable benefits which accrue to me by the Gospel, or to which I become intitled by a sincere compliance with the conditions of the Gospel-covenant, such as *pardon of sin, adoption, sanctification, communion with God, an interest in the love and mercies of Jesus, the in-dwelling of the Divine Spirit, and everlasting life and salvation*; when I consider the representation which *faith* makes of all these things, when I believe that God is the boundless ocean of good, and that all other good things are streams derived from him, surely it is impossible but my heart must flame with *love* to God, be filled with *grateful* sentiments, have a *fervent* zeal for his name, and honour, and interest, and know no greater pleasure than what it finds in commemorating his goodness, and devoting itself to his service. Such a *love of gratitude and zeal* is, under the influence of divine *grace*, a necessary *effect* of such a *faith*.

3. BY representing God who is the *chief good*, and the *fountain* of all that is good besides, as not only *reconcilable*, but as *actually reconciled* to all who truly repent and believe, as their God in covenant, their friend, their father, *faith* produces a *love of complacency*

ⁱ Rom. viii. 28.

placency and delight. Faith has good reason thus to represent God, since the *scripture* so represents him; the word of God not only *authorizes* us thus to conceive of him as ^k *merciful and gracious, slow to anger* and ready to receive the penitent to favour, but makes it our *duty* to believe it; insomuch that we cannot believe the word of God if we do not believe this. Now this alone renders God amiable, but this alone is not sufficient to make us fully delight in God. God has obliged himself by covenant to pardon, to accept, and reward us, not *absolutely*, but on *condition* we *believe and obey the Gospel*; it is therefore necessary that we examine ourselves as to the performance of these conditions, and if upon examination we have reason to think that we are truly penitent, and do yield an unfeigned obedience to the Gospel, then our *faith* has room to exert itself, and naturally breeds *delight*.—"I believe, because the Gospel by its declarations, do-
 " strines and promises will not suffer me to
 " doubt of it, that every sincere penitent has
 " an interest in the favour of God. I have ex-
 " amined myself, I hope, with some good de-
 " gree of care, and see no just cause to question
 " my own sincerity, and do therefore conclude
 " *I have an interest in God*; and having this

^k Exod. xxxiv. 6. Psal. cxlv. 8.

“ persuasion of God and myself, I cannot but
 “ delight in him. I *delight* in him as God, a
 “ Being possessed of all excellence and perfe-
 “ ction natural and moral, as infinite, eternal,
 “ and unchangeable in his wisdom, power,
 “ holiness, justice, goodness and truth, which
 “ must needs render him lovely in the eyes of
 “ all who do not apprehend him to be their
 “ enemy, as blessed be God I do not.”—This
 is *loving God* for his *own sake*, delighting in
 the contemplation of his perfections, especial-
 ly those of a *moral* kind, discerning the excel-
 lence of righteousness, and truth, and good-
 ness, and having the highest veneration of
 the Deity, attended with very great pleasure,
 as possessed of these amiable perfections in
 the utmost degree possible. And yet were
 God apprehended under the notion of an
enemy, this would be such a check upon
 our *love* as to freeze it up, or at best to hin-
 der it from flowing forth so freely towards
 this glorious object as it would else do. But
 I delight in him as God, without any re-
 straint and abatement, when I can delight in
 him as my God; I then delight in him as an
 all-perfect, all-sufficient Being, because I
 now know that none of his perfections are
 against me, and that his all-sufficiency shall
 be my everlasting portion and reward. ¹ *De-*
light thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee
the

¹ Psal. xxxvii. 4.

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the desires of thine heart. “ Lord, I hope,
“ I can affirm that I delight in thee, and
“ therefore humbly take leave to claim this
“ promise of thine. O grant me the de-
“ sires of my heart! They chiefly relate to
“ thy blessed self, and are summed up in
“ this one ruling desire, *that I may yet more*
“ *and more delight in thee.* I am pleased to
“ think that God is holy, and just, and true,
“ especially since I can add with some as-
“ surance, that he has transcribed the image
“ of these perfections in a lower, but I hope
“ prevailing degree, in my soul, so that his
“ holiness is no enemy to my happiness;
“ his justice does not oppose my justification
“ though a sinner, and his truth is my secu-
“ rity for the accomplishment of all his pro-
“ mises.”

By this time you see how it is that *faith*
worketh by love to God.—By representing God
as the *supreme good*, *faith* excites a *love of de-*
fire after him.—By representing him as the
fountain and original of all that good we enjoy
in the order of *nature*, of *Providence*, and
grace, *faith* inspires us with a *love of zeal*
and *gratitude*.—And finally, by representing
God as not only *reconcilable*, but *actually*
reconciled to those who believe and obey the
Gospel, *faith* works in those who by inquiry
have obtained a knowledge of themselves
as truly penitent, a *love of complacency* and

delight. There being nothing wanting in God himself to render him the object of *complacency* to all reasonable minds, who consequently having a just idea of his perfections, and some good degree of resemblance to them, together with a humble assurance of his pardoning mercy and accepting love, cannot but delight in him. And how must this exalt our notion of the value of *faith*, that it is productive of *divine love*, the noblest affection of the human soul and very quintessence of happiness! "Glorious things may be spoken of thee, O Love, when as thou art the best affection, so thou art directed to the best object; and after they have been all said must fall short of fully describing so great excellence!" *Love* is the affection that brings the soul near to God, the nearer in proportion to the degree of this love; so that when our *love* to God shall be perfected, our union with him will be the same. *Love* exalts the mind, enlarges every capacity, and finds employment for every power, invigorates the faculty, and then directs the use of it. ^m *Love is the fulfilling of the law*, does not render God less pleasing to the soul, than the soul to God and to itself; the soul being pleased with itself in the same degree, that it is pleased with the meditations of the divine per-

^m Rom. xiii. 12.

perfections, and bears a resemblance to them. And if such great things may be said of *love*, no little praise must be due to *faith* under the genial influences of which this heavenly plant springs and grows up to perfection. *Faith* is the parent of *love*; and if *faith* is so valuable, what must the *word of God* be which is the instrument of begetting it! Thanks be to God for the Gospel, since *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*. Hearing we believe in God, and believing in him we love him, love him above all, because he is more lovely than all.

2. I AM next to show after what manner *faith* contributes to *brotherly love*, for by this *love* does *faith* work as well as by *love* to God. ° *Hereby we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren*. Every man is our brother in a larger sense, more properly still every christian; but in the strictest and most eminent sense, only good men are brethren one to the other. I shall not quite over-look the more extensive senses of the word, but shall chiefly have regard to that which is most proper.

1. *Faith* represents us and our brother as one in our original, and hereby disposes us

H h 3 to

° Rom. x. 17.

° 1 John iii. 14.

to love him. We have one original *as men*, being descended from the same common root of the human race, and partakers of the same nature. ^p *Did not he that made me in the womb, make this and the other person? And did not one fashion us in the womb?* Has he not ^q *made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth?* Now even this is a reasonable motive for love to all mankind, that we are creatures endowed with the same faculties, and liable to the same weaknesses, and belonging to the same family, and sharers in the unhappy consequences of the disobedience of our *first* Parents. We not only bear the image of the same *earthly* Parent, but ^r *one is our Father*, in another and higher sense, even God, for God is the creator of all, the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits. And should not all this knit the hearts of men in mutual affection? Must they not all be desirous of pleasing their common Parent; and can they do any thing more pleasing to him than promoting the *common good* of his offspring? Again, as *christians* we have *one God and Father*, who has taken us into his family again after our rebellion, and reckons us in the number of his children. To the *christian* church in general, as to the *Jewish* for-

^p Job xxxi, 15.
xxiii. 9.

^q Acts xvii, 26.

^r Matt.

formerly [†] *pertaineth the adoption.* And shall not those of the same family, not only *fellow-servants* but *brethren*, dwell together in *unity*? This is more especially the case with regard to those who are not only christians in *name*, but according to a judgment of charity in *sincerity and truth*. God has begotten us by his *Word* and *Spirit* to a new life, this we are taught by *faith* which brings us acquainted with another life besides that which the regenerate enjoy in common with the rest of mankind, a life which vastly exceeds not only the animal but the merely rational, flowing from higher principles, directed by nobler views, and prompted by more excellent desires and inclinations. Of this life *faith* informs us that the *Divine Spirit* is the great original, and all true christians are joint partakers; so that by means of this *Spirit* which dwelleth in all virtuous minds, and of that life it begets in them, they are more nearly related to one another than those can be who are only kins-folks according to the flesh, and born of the same blood. Now if consanguinity be a ground of mutual endearment, if brethren by carnal descent are obliged to love one another, and are thought unjust to nature if they are without this affection, how much more should this *affinity* or rather *unity* of *Spirit*

H h 4

which

† Rom. ix. 4.

which *faith* assures us there is between sincere christians, ingage all such in the bonds of the dearest and tenderest love to one another? Is it not a great deal more to be the children of one God than of one and the same earthly parent? Or of the same progenitors a generation or two back? To have the same *Divine Spirit* uniting our souls, than the same blood running in our veins? The relation in the former case is certainly much nearer, much nobler, and I will add infinitely more lasting, since while the relation which is founded in blood is extinguished by death, this spiritual relation subsists to eternity the same, and is therefore a ground of everlasting indearments.

AND forasmuch as those who are not real christians are capable of becoming so, and being *born again of the Spirit* as well as of *water*, *faith* considers them in this view, and in this view leads us to *love* them, that is, with a *love of benevolence* or *good-will*, sincerely wishing their happiness; as besides this, there is another *love* which passes betwixt those who are actually *renewed in the spirit of their minds*, even a *love of complacency* and *delight*. There is a preference in respect of benevolence due to persons of sincere piety, while that delight which they take in each other, as bearing the image of God

God in *true holiness* as well as *knowledge*, is necessarily confined amongst themselves.

2. *Faith* represents christians most eminently true christians, as *one* in their *head*. Therefore when our blessed Saviour prays that his followers *may be one*, he speaks of himself as the principle and center of their unity. *That they all may be one as thou father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.* ^u *There is one body, and one Lord, who is head of that body.* This brings the union still closer than the last particular did. There men were considered only as children of the *same father*, here as members of the *same body*, and united to the *same head*. How monstrous then, how unnatural must want of *love* be in christians one towards another? *Faith* must needs condemn all alienation of affection, and even shiness and distance here. *Faith* cannot but demand the warmest love, the tenderest sympathy, the most active charity; for how else do we answer the relation we have to one another, and to our common head? Here we may very well ask, if we *love* not our christian brother, how dwelleth the *love* of Christ in us? Of which presently. Is not ^w *Christ our head,*
from

^t John xvii. 21, 23. ^u Eph. iv. 4, 5. ^w Eph. iv. 16.

from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying itself in love? The increase of love is the true edification of the christian church; it is not bare numbers make a flourishing church, but numbers held together by fervent charity; so that the Apostle Peter had good reason to say, ** above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.*

3. *Faith* represents all true christians as one in their end. We are *† all called in one hope of our calling*, that is, to the hope of the same blessedness. The same heaven is proposed to all, and all alike are invited by *patient continuance in well-doing, to seek glory, and honour, and immortality*; and all real christians agree in seeking this as their chief and ultimate felicity. They shall all meet in the same heavenly kingdom, all injoy the same incorruptible inheritance, all compose one and the same bright and glorious assembly. Their happiness is to be *one*, and a great part of this happiness will consist in *love*, which consequently must be their happiness and their duty now. They are instructed by *faith* to look upon themselves and all true christians *‡ as strangers and pilgrims in this*

* 1 Pet. iv. 8.

† Ephes. iv. 4.

‡ Heb. xi.

this world, as fellow-travellers towards the heavenly country; *here they have no abiding city, but they look for one to come.* Now their being strangers in this world, should, while they are here conflicting with the same enemies and dangers, mightily indear them to one another; and much more should their belonging to the same country, the same city, the same family above. After this manner does *faith work by brotherly love*, as well as by love to God.

3. *Faith in Christ works by love to Christ.* It is impossible but it must, in case of its being genuine. For what is *faith in Christ* but a firm persuasion of the truth of all that is related concerning him in the writings of the New Testament? And can we really believe these things, and seriously lay them to heart, and not be convinced of our unspeakable obligations to the Son of God? What an excellent person he is in himself, and how wonderful and unparallelled his affection has shewn itself to the children of men? Or can we be deeply, thoroughly convinced of this, and feel no lively, no correspondent sentiments and dispositions of soul working in us towards our blessed Saviour? We very often speak of Christ under the appellation of our *dear Redeemer*, and there is the greatest reason in the

the world why he should be so to all his followers; and ^a to those who believe indeed he is precious; they ^b love him in sincerity, they love him ^c above all, more than any earthly friend, more than any outward enjoyment whatsoever, more than life itself.

For let us very briefly reflect,

I. How amiable our blessed Lord appears in the account which the sacred writers have given us of him, as having every quality and excellence which can recommend him to the esteem and love of all upright minds, without any one moral defect to stain the beauty of his character. He is described as ^a holy, ^b harmless, ^c undefiled, and ^d separate from sinners; as one who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; as meek and lowly in heart; so meek that when reviled, he reviled not again; but patiently endured the contradiction of sinners; as one who has given us an example of every virtue which he had an opportunity to practise; of the most intire obedience, the most profound resignation, the most fervent love to God, of the most active and the most extensive charity to mankind, and

^a 1 Pet. ii. 7. ^b Ephes. vi. 24. ^c Mat. x. 37. ^d Heb. vii. 26. 1 Pet. ii. 22. Mat. xi. 29. Heb. xii. 3.

of the most generous contempt of all earthly things, whether riches, honours, or pleasures, the usual baits to poor deluded mortals, by which thousands and ten thousands of them are seduced, but which proved no manner of temptation to him. Whoever believes in Christ, believes all this of him; and how then can he otherwise than love one who is so lovely and excellent? He must needs do it, unless he be a stranger to these amiable things in himself; for then indeed it is no wonder that he does not love the most ingaging character, when it is opposite to his own. But they who have any thing of real holiness and goodness themselves, know how to prize it in others according to its respective degrees, and must therefore have the highest value for the holiness of their Saviour, in whom it exists in the most transcendent degree of perfection.

2. LET us consider not only his *own loveliness*, but in what an astonishing manner he has demonstrated his *kindness* and *love* to the sinful children of men. Though *he had a glory with the father before the world was*, yet *he emptied himself and took on him the form of a servant*; nay, he *humiliated himself yet further*, even so far as to *become obedient unto death*, the painful, the shameful,

ful, the accursed *death of the cross*. And for whom was '*Messiah cut off?* Not for himself, but for us. Whose *† sins did he bear in his body on the tree?* Whose but *ours*, for whom he made an atonement by his most precious blood, which flowed fast from his pierced hands and feet, but not so fast and in so full a stream as his love to apostate men? By *faith* we see this divine person leaving the bosom of his father, coming down from heaven, throwing a veil over his glory, flying on the wings of love to the rescue of a perishing world; to this end clothing himself with human flesh and with human infirmities, submitting to a life of poverty, and meanness, and labour, to pain, reproach, and death; and all this that he might *reconcile us to God*, destroy sin, abolish death, and purchase glory and immortality for us. This is the point of view in which our *faith* sets the Lord Jesus Christ before us, even as our Saviour, and our Saviour not by *acting* only on our behalf, but *suffering* too; his victories were won with blood. In this view of the Redeemer how highly deserving of love must he appear to all grateful souls, deserving of more than they can possibly pay, so that they must be still owing love to their Saviour while they are still paying it to eternity!—Having
ing

† Dan. ix. 26. † Isa. liii. 4. † Pet. ii. 24.

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ing thus shown how *faith works by love*, I shall reserve for another Discourse,

II. THE proof that a *faith which worketh not by love*, is in the Gospel estimation nothing worth.



SER.



S E R M O N XIX.

No Faith saving but that which
works by Love.

GAL. V. 6.

— *But faith which worketh by
love.*

IN a foregoing Discourse on these words,
I shewed you after what manner *faith
works by love* to God, to our brother, and
to *Christ Jesus* our Saviour; it remains that
in pursuance of the method proposed, I

II. MAKE it appear that a *faith which
worketh not by love*, is, according to the esti-
mation of the Gospel, good for nothing,
and will avail nothing. And a very easy
task I have to prove this. We can hardly
read the scriptures of the New Testament
so

so carelessly, but we must be convinced of this truth. You know our Saviour's answer to him who asked him, *Which is the great commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* This is the sum and abridgment of the moral law, and of the preceptive part of the Gospel too. For as the Gospel-constitution is founded in the love of God to mankind, so one chief design of it seems to be, by the discovery of the love of God to us in Christ Jesus our Lord, to engage our love to God, to Christ the Son of God, and to one another. Where our religion does not beget this love to God and men, one principal part of our Saviour's errand into the world is frustrated, for when he came down from heaven, he brought this sacred fire from thence, and he made it his business to kindle it upon earth, in order to animate us with it, who without this flame are little better than so many cold and lifeless statues of clay. Those most powerful motives to every kind of obedience, the love of God and of Jesus to man-

Matt. xxii. 37—40.

kind, are particularly urged as motives to love. The love of God is made an argument for this by St. John, ^b *If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. And we love him because he first loved us.* And so likewise is the love of Jesus our Saviour by St. Paul, ^c *Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savour.* The stress which our religion lays upon this point is very remarkable. In the Text it is said, that *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.* The Jews valued themselves upon their being *circumcised*, as this rite was a mark of their being in covenant with God, and his peculiar people; on the contrary, after the coming of Christ, when *circumcision* was abolished, or rather exchanged for another ordinance more agreeable to the nature of the Gospel-institution, there were without doubt, among the professors of christianity some, who instead of *judaizing* as too many did, gloried in their *uncircumcision*, or in their refusal to comply with the imposing spirit of the *jewish* converts. Now both the one and the other of these, if they imagined their zeal for or against *circumcision* would stand in the room of every thing else, particularly would

^b 1 John iv. 11, 19. ^c Ephes. v. 2.

would atone for the want of *love*, were very much mistaken, since *faith* in Christ, attended with *zeal* on one side or the other, is of no avail, unless it wrought by *love* to God and man. The same holds good as to *zeal* in respect of any external observations whatsoever; let this *zeal* be supposed never so laudable in itself, yet unaccompanied with *love*, it is of no manner of account. ^d *The end of the commandment is charity* or love. This may be particularly understood of the command the Apostle had given his son *Timothy* just before; but is however true of all God's commandments in general. These *commandments* are exceeding broad, great is their number and variety, yet they all center in this precept of *love*; they have all this view and tendency, and are united in this point and by this bond of perfection. Where there is *faith* unfeigned joined with serious meditation, this design of the divine commandments will in some good measure be attained, and our *love* will proceed from a pure or single heart and a good conscience. To these proofs let us add the noble eulogy and description of *love* which we meet with in the xiiiith Chapter of the 1st Epistle to the *Corinthians*, particularly ver. 2. *Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity or love, I am nothing.* Such a *faith* as this (I mean the

I i 2

faith

^d 1 Tim. i. 5.

^e Psal. cxix. 96.

faith of *miracles*) in the first publication of the Gospel did great honour to God, at present we must not pretend to it, having no promise to warrant our pretensions; though it seems if we had, and could by virtue of it perform the most stupendous works, yet *without charity* or love to God and man, we should, if weighed in the Gospel-balance, not only be found most miserably *wanting*, but appear to be *nothing*. Whatever our *faith* might be, we ourselves in our christian capacity should be *nothing*. And we as christians being *nothing*, our *faith* could not be worth much.—After this, will any in defiance of the declared design of the Gospel, and the authority of St. *Paul* (shall I say, or rather the author of our religion himself) rely upon any thing besides a *faith that worketh by love*? Will any whose hearts are quite cold and dead, utterly void of *love* to God and man, and of the true love of Jesus, call themselves the disciples of Christ, and fancy they are better christians than others, only because they are, it may be, perpetually talking about *faith*, and *justification*, and the *grace* of God, and have such notions and opinions affixed to these words, as perhaps others more impartial and intelligent christians who keep more closely to the word of God cannot approve? Ah, my friends, it is a most wretched error which
has

has cost the church of Christ exceeding dear, that religion lies in wrangling and disputing, and that men discover their christianity more by biting and devouring one another, than by having *love* one for another ! It is a most lamentable case that we should attempt to substitute our own irregular passions, our pride, our self-love, our revenge, and even our spleen itself in the room of this heavenly passion, and then by offering this *strange fire* on God's altar, think to put a cheat upon him, as we have done upon ourselves, and make sure of his acceptance. Far be it from me to say or suggest any thing to the disparagement of *faith*, or form any of you to entertain low thoughts of it ; it is certainly, when genuine and compleat, a most excellent grace. And yet having so great an authority for it as that of the Apostle *Paul*, I take leave to say, *and now abide these three, faith, hope, and charity*, which may be looked upon as the *three* cardinal virtues of the Gospel state, *but the greatest of these is charity*. And such is the superiour excellence of this grace, that it lends a value even to our *faith*, since *faith* is therefore valuable because it *worketh by love*, and where it *does not work by love*, is no more a *christian* grace than a *glow-worm*, because it shines a little in the dark, has the intrinsick worth of a

diamond. Let us often think of this, we cannot indeed think of it too often, that *love* is that which fills up our *faith*, animates it with a soul, cloths it with a substantial body, and supplies it with blood and spirits, which else is but a lifeless naked skeleton. O *Love*, thou very best passion of the human heart when rightly placed! Whence is it that mankind are no more smitten with thy charms, that they should take a false, an earthly love instead of thee, and shut and bar their hearts against this heavenly affection? Why should they talk as if this *pure love* were but a *chimera* or fancy, no passion belonging to human nature, which according to them is wholly influenced and acted by principles of fear, and hatred, or at best of a prudent artful and disguised *self-love*? Alas, do they not talk thus of this divine *love* because they do not know it, and never felt its sweet constraining influence! This it is to be feared is generally the case. Did they only speak indifferently of *love*, and refuse to give it entertainment in their breasts, who injoy not the Gospel-revelation, or disbelieve it, this were not so much to be wondered at, because the heart of man is corrupted by sinful customs, and this corruption of the moral habits of the soul occasions a like corruption in the notions and judgments of men; and we may say that reigning opinions

ons and vitious habits and customs have almost stifled the small remains of goodness, virtue, and humanity in too many. But that christians, and such christians as make pretensions to the highest degrees of knowledge and spirituality, and would be reckoned greater proficient in the school of Christ than others, that they should think meanly of *love*, and in their practice at least treat it as a matter of indifference (as if it was no evangelical grace, or at best only a *counsel of perfection*, not an indispensable command) is what at first thought we may find it difficult to account for; till we further reflect, that, though the ignorance and errors of the understanding cannot stand before the light of the Gospel, yet the corruption of the heart too often remains much the same; but that this corruption must be subdued before divine *love* can take up its abode in the soul. Now rather than consent to part with their darling corruptions, men will persuade themselves that *love* is not so absolutely necessary as it is made by some, and as the Gospel at first view seems to make it; and that a *zealous controversial faith* may well enough supply the room of it. This, with the influence of the false notions in which too many christians have been bred, and a conceit that they have *love* when really they have it not, is the best account I can give of

the little regard which is paid to the precept of *love* by the christian world. And yet even this does not wholly account for it, and take away all ground of wonder that those who are not utter strangers to reason and religion should imagine, that the duty of *love*, a vital active *love*, will be dispensed with upon any consideration whatsoever.—It is still wonderful how reasonable creatures can suppose that God will excuse them from obedience to so reasonable a command as *love*.—It is wonderful how creatures who desire to be happy, should satisfy themselves without that *love* which is manifestly essential to the notion of a rational happiness.—Finally, it is wonderful how christians can think that God will accept any thing else in lieu of *love*, when the whole frame of the Gospel is so evidently adapted to promote the *love* which it commands.—Let us briefly go over each of these.

I. IT is wonderful how reasonable creatures can suppose, that God will excuse them from obedience to so reasonable a command as *love*. Is it not reasonable that we should love the Lord our God? Against which of the three sorts of *divine love* can we object, against a love of *desire*, a love of *zeal* and *gratitude*, or a love of *delight*? Is it a dictate of common reason that we should
 desire

desire that most which is most desirable? And can any thing be more desirable than the fruition of an infinite good, that is, of God? Is it not absolutely reasonable that we should be most zealously affected towards him from whom we have received the greatest obligations? And from whom have we received obligations, I will not say equal to those we are under to God, but which bear the least degree of comparison with them? The obligations we have to all other Beings taken together, or that we can possibly have, are as nothing in this view. Is it not apparently reasonable that we should delight in him whose perfections are the noblest object of delight, and his acceptance and favour the justest foundation of joy? Or can we say that there is any thing unreasonable in the *love* of our fellow-christians? Were we not obliged to *love* them for their *own sakes*, which we certainly are, yet for *God's sake* who requires this love as an evidence of our love to him, we cannot withhold our love from our christian brother, if we are first of all convinced that we ought to love God. And as for the *love* of Christ, this must appear most reasonable to every christian who believes and considers what the New Testament reveals to us of his native excellencies, his generous unparallelled affection to the children of men, and the invaluable blessings he procured for them by his death.

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The duty of *love* then is intirely reasonable, and being so can we imagine that God will excuse us from it, or by way of *commutation* accept of something else in its stead? To suppose this is to suppose that God may be pleased with his reasonable creatures though they refuse to act reasonably.

2. It is wonderful how creatures who desire to be happy, should be able to satisfy themselves without that *love* which is manifestly essential to the notion of true happiness. For so it is plain the *love* of God and one another is to the happiness of rational Beings as we are. It is what they cannot want but they must be miserable. Our happiness as rational, must consist in our intercourse with God, and our amicable society and converse with one another. This is the account which revelation gives us of the happiness of heaven. This happiness evidently supposes *love* which is the great band of all agreeable union and society. The commerce of any Beings whatsoever who are not joined together in *love*, instead of contributing to their real felicity, is only a ground of perpetual jealousies and of mutual discontent. Our own experience may convince us of this if we make any reflections upon it, there being nothing less delightful than to be confined to the company of those we do not love. And it would be the very same with

respect to the presence of God, of Christ, and the society of the saints in light, in case we did not love them. O let us not think that only the happiness of heaven requires *love*, and that when we come to heaven where we cannot be happy without this *love*, we shall have it kindled in our breasts, though we live utter strangers to it now! This would be a groundless and absurd imagination. The happiness which the christian ought to propose even in this life, is chiefly that which flows from converse with God, the love of Christ, and the communion of saints; and whoever has any other notion of the happiness of a christian shews himself to have little knowledge and less goodness and devotion. Now the question is, how this communion shall be maintained where there is no real affection; or where this affection is not prevailing, but gives way to some other? To talk of divine and christian fellowship without *love*, is the greatest inconsistency. And then supposing a christian might be happy as a christian without this *love*, during his stay upon earth, though he cannot be so in heaven, can we be so weak as to think that love to God, to Christ, and to the saints, may fill those hearts after death, where it had no room allowed it before? That we may be perfect in *love* any more than in other graces and virtues all at once, and

and without any previous endeavours after and steps towards it in this life? This cannot be; if we would love God perfectly in heaven, we must love him sincerely and supremely now; if we would take pleasure in the glorious inhabitants of the upper world, our *delight must be in the excellent of the earth*. We must now begin and carry on what the future state will finish. This the notion of the present state, as a state of trial and discipline, plainly implies, otherwise it would not be a state of trial; if after all we pass into the state of final happiness without being at all prepared for it, as good have fixed us there at first for any use of which the present state will be as a state of probation.

3. IT is wonderful how any professing the Gospel can think that something else may be accepted instead of *love*, when the whole frame of the Gospel is so admirably adapted to promote that *love* which it commands. The precepts of the Gospel do all run in this strain; and when besides this the doctrines and promises of the Gospel have the same tendency to beget and cherish this *love*, when the beginning and the end of the Gospel-institution, the foundation and the superstructure is *love*, when the very spirit of the Gospel is a *spirit of love*, how can we be so blind as not to see the necessity of loving God, and Christ, and one another? A man
may

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may as well be a man without *reason*, as a christian be truly such without *love*. And after all this, can it enter into our thoughts, that tho' the doctrines, precepts, and promises of the Gospel, fail of accomplishing their chief design in us, tho' we have little or nothing of a Gospel-temper, tho' we want the most distinguishing characteristick of a christian, love to God, and to one another, we may yet be accepted? How many and how great soever the defects are under which we labour, our *faith* will cover all? There are hardly any contradictions we are not fitted to swallow, if we can believe this.

Let us now hear the conclusion of the whole matter by way of *Application*.

I. SINCE the sum and substance of true religion consists in *faith working by love*, let us be persuaded to try our *faith* by this test. We all have *faith*, the profession we make of the Gospel implies it; for in professing the Gospel, what else do we but profess our belief of the truth of the Gospel, or its divine original? And if we believe the truth of the Gospel, we believe the truth of every thing contained in it, *explicitly* of those things which we know to be there revealed, and *implicitly* of all the rest. We believe then that ^h *there is one God the father, of whom*
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^h 1 Cor. viii. 6. Heb. viii. 1. 2 Cor. v. 19.
Heb. vii. 25.

are all things, and we by him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him. We believe that God has spoken to us by his Son, and by him has reconciled the world to himself, so that none, who come unto God by him, shall be cast off. This is our *faith*, and a great deal of reason we have for it; 'tis in itself a reasonable and a well-grounded persuasion, whether we are able to assign the reasons of our *faith* or no. But that *faith* which is or may be *common* to all christians, as the *faith* now mentioned may, cannot be that which is necessary to distinguish *real* christians, from those who are only christians in *name*. It concerns us therefore to inquire diligently what are the distinctive marks of a *saving faith*. Some have placed the essence of such a *faith* in an *assurance* of our *own salvation*, when it must be evident to any one, who impartially considers it, that *assurance*, where it is not well-grounded, is so far from being a grace of the Gospel, that it is nothing else but the fruit of gross ignorance, either of *ourselves*, or of our *rule*. And on the contrary, if our *assurance* be built on a *firm* foundation, and then only it is of value, 'tis not *bare assurance*, but the *foundation* of it, which must satisfy us of our covenant-title to the promises of the Gospel. The question then, if I am confident of my salvation, is,
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what is it makes me so ; or how may I come to be rationally assured of my interest in God through Christ, according to the terms of the Gospel ? The solution of which question may be easily fetched from the subject we are now upon. Is my *faith* a *bare assent* to the great doctrines of the Gospel, or does it *work by love* ? A *mere assent* of the mind has nothing virtuous and commendable in it ; but ¹ *love is the fulfilling of the whole law, of the law of faith*, as well as of every other divine law. Let us then faithfully examine our hearts, where, if any where, we must meet with the evidences of an *evangelical faith*. Are our hearts possessed and actuated by right affections ? Does the love of God reign there, or the love of the world, or some other idol ? Do we love all those who *love the Lord Jesus in sincerity* ? Do we love those with a love of *complacency* and *delight*, and all others with a love of *good-will*, wishing their happiness as unfeignedly as we do our own ? Or does *self-love* (not an *enlightned self-love*, which includes that which is *social*, but *blind and mistaken*) swallow up all our regards, so as to render us indifferent to the interests of others, any further than as they are subservient to a secular interest of our own ? Upon the *former* supposition, we are the disciples
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¹ Rom. xiii. 10.

of Christ indeed, upon the *latter* not. In one case our *faith* is genuine, in the other of no worth. But forasmuch as persons may mistake that for *love* to God and their fellow-christians which is not so, I therefore add

2. A *faith that worketh by love*, being of such infinite importance to our present safety and final happiness, the next inquiry is, how we shall know our *love* to be genuine? We are to try our *faith* by our *love*; but how shall we try our *love*? It will be of the most fatal consequence to take the counterfeit for the reality, something that is like the thing, but is not really so, for the thing itself. There is a short answer ready to this question; would you make trial of your *love*? *By its fruits you shall know it.* Love is an active industrious passion, whether it terminates on things or persons. We are willing to take any pains in things we greatly love, and grudge not any labour in the service of those for whom we have a sincere and fervent affection. Accordingly we read of ^k *the labour of love*. Let us then consider this *laboriousness* of *love*, as it has a distinct regard to God, to our Saviour, and to our fellow-christians.

WITH respect to God, *love* will labour to frame the christian's whole behaviour so as to render it pleasing to him. And as it will

^k 1 Theff. i. 3.

will have this good influence upon the christian's *ordinary* conversation, so as to any *special* opportunities that may offer of promoting the interest of God, and the glory of his name, *love* will make the christian quick to espy, and glad to improve them.

I. *Love* to God will labour to frame the christian's whole behaviour, so as to render it pleasing to him. He who loves God in any measure as he ought, will be studious to know his will, and as ready to perform it. That a servant loves his master, and a son his father, we know by their earnest care to do whatever they apprehend will be grateful, and to avoid the contrary; by their assiduity, their obsequiousness, and their diligence. This is the surest test of their *love*, and as often as *love* is sincere, it will bear this test; when it does not, all men are agreed to look upon it as a counterfeit, an hypocritical affection. And there is no reason why *love*, which is *laborious* in the service of an earthly master or parent, should not be the same in the service of God, our sovereign Lord and Master, and our heavenly Father, but infinitely greater reason why it should. *Love* will be the most powerful motive to the performance of every known duty, and the most effectual restraint from every sin; and which is more, *love* will

make us inquisitive to know the whole extent of our duty, wherein we shall please God, and obey and glorify him. Nay, ¹ *having received how we ought to walk, so as to please God, love* will teach us to *abound more and more*; it will not stop at what is absolutely necessary to be done, but will be more liberal and generous in its returns, and do all it can. There will be much the same difference between a christian acted by *love*, and another who is influenced only by *fear*, or has no regard in religion, but to himself, as between the service of a *son* and of a *slave*; or betwixt one who *loves* his master, and another who serves him merely for *hire*, and so does no more than he needs must. No instructor like *love*, no monitor like *love*, no prompter and commander like *love*. In the whole course of our conversation, *love* will instruct us what to do, will easily solve the most difficult cases, break through the most violent opposition, strongly excite us to obedience, and render every act of obedience delightful.

2. As the *love* of God will have this good influence upon the christian's *ordinary* conversation, so as to any *special* opportunities which may offer of promoting the interest of God, and the glory of his name, *love* will make the christian quick to espy, and

and glad to improve them. The aim and business of *love* is to discover itself by all the ways it can, and therefore whenever any extraordinary or less common occasion of serving the cause of God occurs, *true love* will be so far from declining it, and endeavouring to excuse itself by mean and pitiful evasions, as the manner is of too many professing the gospel, who know how to shake off the burthen from their own shoulders, (a burthen they account it, which they would call by another name, if *love* had the command of their hearts) and like the ^m *nobles* in the building of the temple, *put not their necks to the work of the Lord*; *true love*, I say, would be so far from acting such a part itself, or suffering those in whom it dwelt to act it, as to esteem every opportunity of this kind, which the Providence of God brings in its way, a favour bestowed rather than a difficult duty required; and accordingly would make men embrace it with all readiness. They in whom this divine *love* has its abode, so as to reign in them, will be ambitious of deserving the character given by St. Paul to the *Corinthians*, when he tells them, ⁿ *that he knew the forwardness of their minds for which he boasted of them to other churches*; and that *their zeal had provoked many*. In such there will be always

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^m Nehem. iii. 5.ⁿ 2 Cor. ix. 2,

a ° *willing mind*, if there be nothing else ; and where this is, *it will be accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not.* But then it is supposed that a man promotes the cause of religion, and the interest of God's church, *according to that which he has* ; otherwise, it is plain he has not a *willing*, or well-disposed mind, and will in vain attempt by fair speeches, and a form of hypocritical devotion, to make up for the manifest disproportion between his actions and his abilities, his profession, and his *labours of love* for God's sake. You see then that *love*, as it regards God, will appear in the christian's care and study to frame his whole behaviour and conversation so as to please God, and to improve those special opportunities which offer for promoting the interest of God, and the glory of his name.

WITH regard to our Saviour (who is the next object in dignity of the true christian's *love*) the same thing may be observed, that *if we love him, we shall keep his commandments* ; this being the test which he himself, as well as the reason and nature of the thing, has fixed of our *love*. We shall do as he hath commanded us, and as he hath given us an example. To shew how much we love him, we shall labour to be more exact
and

and perfect in our obedience to him, and shall be the more exact, the more we love him; that as we look upon him as perfectly amiable on account of the beauty of holiness in which he shines, we shall shew it by aspiring to be like him in this respect, to the constant obedience which we pay to his authority, adding the delightful imitation of all his excellencies in which we are capable of imitating him. It will be our earnest desire to *be in the world as he was in the world, to have the same mind in us that was in him*, and to behave so at all times and upon all occasions that his name be not in any thing dishonoured, nor occasion given to those who seek it most of speaking evil of his holy religion. “In what way shall I
 “most recommend the profession of the Gospel, make the light of it to shine before
 “men, convince them of its internal excellence and the divine character of its Author,
 “and thereby win them to the love of both?” This will be the solicitous care of *love* to Christ where it is sincere, the natural effect of which will be our leading such a life as the Gospel teaches us, *i. e.* a holy, a useful, a devout, and heavenly one, this being the only life by which Christ is honoured, and his Gospel adorned.

FINALLY, In regard of men, *love* will ingage us to do them all the service we are able, by promoting their temporal and spiritual welfare, by offices of kindness, and by all the acts of charity and beneficence, we can think on. *Love* to others cannot suffer us to be indifferent to their happiness, any more than *self-love* will allow us to be so to our own; to look on and let them lie under any evil from which it is in our power to rescue them. It is but half of the character of *love*^a *that it thinketh no evil*; tho' this half be abundantly more than is commonly practised; *love* also thinketh all manner of good; it meditates and contrives ways of being beneficial to others, readily lends them assistance, advises them in their doubts and difficulties, comforts them in their troubles, relieves them in their wants, bears their burthens, defends their good name, befriends them in their worldly business and affairs, and in short thinks not much to do them a considerable kindness at the expence of a little breath, or time, or pains, or money. *Love* will not say "*Who made me my brother's keeper?*" What is it to me whether others rejoice or weep, abound or suffer need? How is my interest and happiness affected by it? Let every

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

“ every man look to himself, and God
 “ take care of us all.” *Love* can never
 talk and reason after this manner. And yet
 by their actions too many say this, and a
 great deal more, which shews them to be
 intirely possessed by a vicious *self-love*. [†] *My*
little children, saith St. *John*, *let us not love*
in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.
 Then do we *love in word only*, when as the
 case is represented by the Apostle [†] *James*,
we say to a brother or sister that is naked and
destitute of daily food, depart in peace, be ye
warmed or filled, but give them not such things
as are needful for the body. What does such a
love profit them or us? Them it is plain it
 does not, and as little does it profit us in
 respect of any reward that we are to expect
 from God, or any acceptance it will find in
 his sight. *Love* is a tree which never fails
 of bearing fruit, and as it were offers its
 loaden branches to the hand of the gatherer.
 Again, *love* will seek to gain the good-will
 of every one by a sweet and innocent be-
 haviour, and to keep clear of every thing
 which may grieve and offend. He who is
 under the guidance of this principle, will
 not needlessly choose to say or do any thing
 which may give another pain and uneasiness,
 he will not delight by ill-natured passionate
 expressions, or hard censures and insinuations,
 to

[†] John iii. 18. . [†] James ii. 16.

to vex and torment any one, especially a good man, and to inflict wounds which are not so quickly healed as they are made. He will consult the notions and tempers of men, and as far as he can lawfully do it, accommodate himself to them, so as to forbear grating on the tender part, and doing that which others may reckon a small matter, but they will not.—Upon the whole, would we try our *love* as we ought to do by such marks as these, too many, I fear, would find themselves extremely deficient, and all of us in too great a degree. Let none cheat themselves as they may have done by resting in a *faith* which does not *work by love*, or in a *love* which is *barren and unfruitful*. Let us not think that we love God when we do not strive to please him, when our *love* does not make us careful and diligent in his service, when we shun instead of seeking opportunities of promoting the cause and interest of God in the world. Let us not imagine we really love Christ, when our lives are a manifest contradiction to his Gospel, and our tempers to his. Let us not pretend to love our fellow-christians, when we have no desire to do them good, when we matter not what influence our behaviour towards them has upon their peace and happiness, when we would almost as soon do them an ill turn as a good one, offend as edify

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edify them, make them sorrowful as glad. Either this is not christian love, or christian love does not show itself as all other love does. *Let our love to God, to Jesus, and to our fellow-christians, be without dissimulation*; let it be expressed in all proper ways; then should we towards God and Christ be thankful, devout and obedient, towards men kind and charitable and tender and communicative; and in short should easily satisfy all that knew us, that our *Faith* thus *working* by such a *love* was sincere and saving. *Amen.*

† Rom. xii. 9.

Μονω τω Θεω Δοξα.

The End of the SECOND VOLUME.



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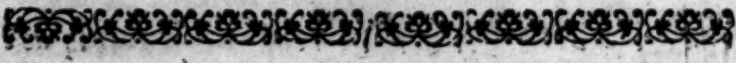
To be corrected.

V O L. I.

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